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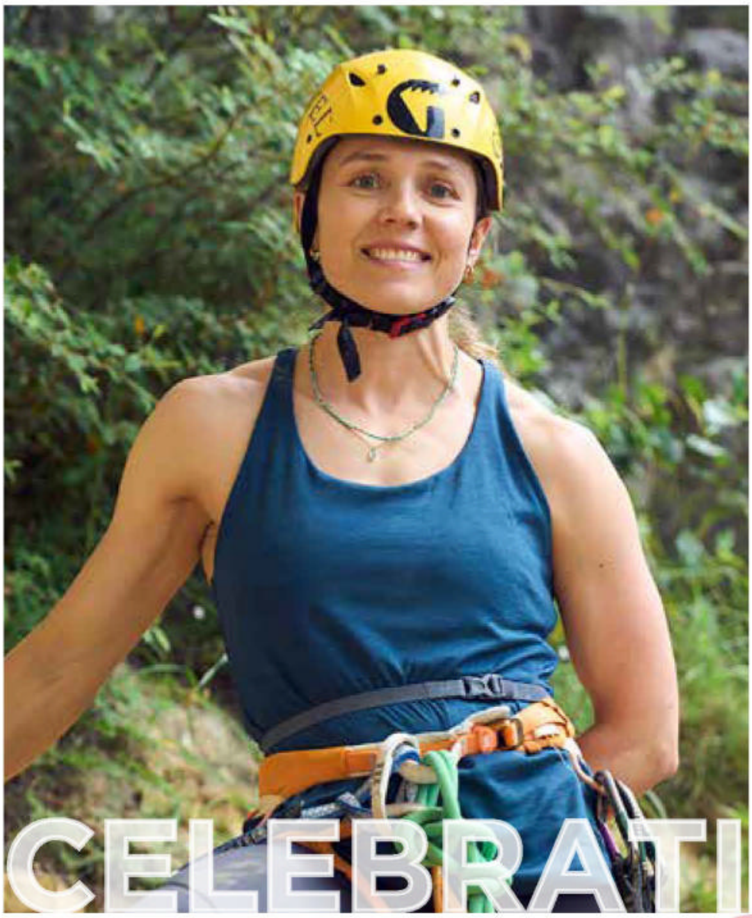

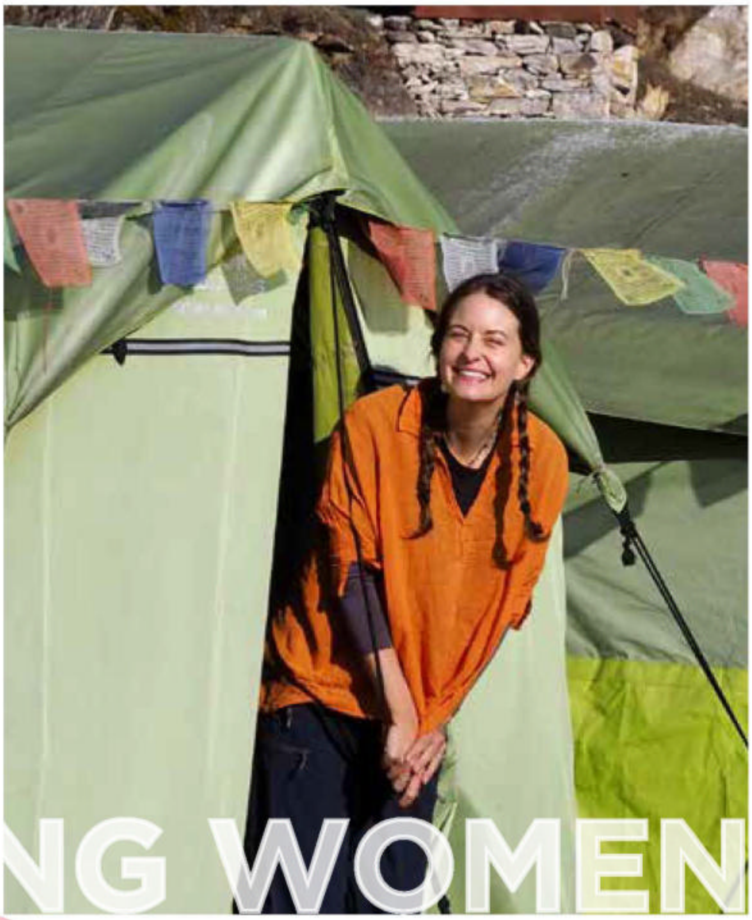

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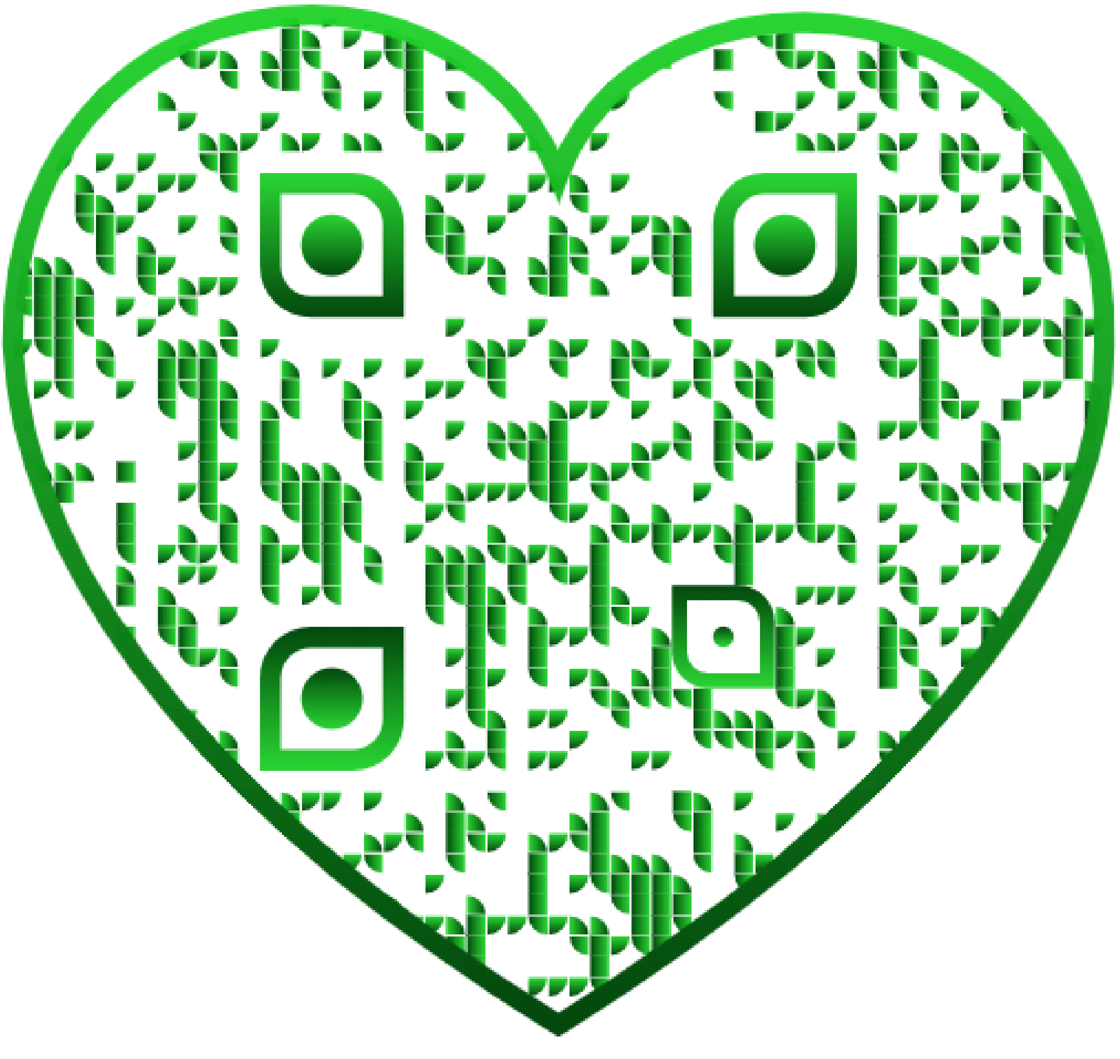

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Opioids, Bears and the Art of Just Looking

Sooner or later, an active lifestyle has a way of catching up with you. Whether it's a bike crash, a skiing mishap, a surfing wipeout, or simply being a bit uncoordinated, those inevitable falls take their toll. Then, a bit like having the bearings done on an old trailer, shoulder reconstruction becomes inevitable.

I'd put it off as long as possible; there was a two-week ski trip to Canada looming on the horizon. I'd hoped the specialist would give me a magic potion injection, but he said if he did that, I wouldn't come back for the surgery I actually needed. He was probably right. So I loaded up on codeine and had a great two weeks, sore shoulder and all. On our return, ACC, in its wisdom, decided to question the nature of the injury. Another six weeks went by, and more codeine followed.Then came May 1st, and shoulder surgery day.

When you've been told you can't do anything—no biking, skiing, fishing, surfing, nothing that could cause an impact injury, there isn't much left to do. So we decided to go to Alaska. My delightful wife said she would drive the campervan, and all I had to do was look out the window, which I did for over 4,000 miles!

Now, when you have feet as itchy as mine, that might sound like torture. I thought it would be, but it wasn't. I learned a new skill: the art of truly looking.

But first, let me tell you about opioids. The flight to Alaska was long, and I got out of sync with my pain medication schedule. So I simply stopped taking everything, just to see how I'd cope. It was painful but tolerable. Within a day, I was feeling fine. Then, out of nowhere, I thought I'd contracted food poisoning, accompanied by extreme hot flushes and itching skin that felt like fire ants were marching across my body.

Long story short, I ended up in hospital on a drip, being treated by a doctor who told me she'd "cut her teeth on the dark side of Vancouver, where OxyContin addiction was epidemic." She said, "I thought you were in withdrawal the moment you walked through that door." Apparently, you can't just stop taking large doses of codeine, going cold turkey without consequences. You go into opioid withdrawal! Within a few days, I had recovered from the worst of it, but the lesson was learned the hard way.

Back to "looking." As the opioid withdrawal subsided, the view out the window took on a whole new meaning. In a month, we stayed in only one official campground. Instead, we nestled beside pristine lakes, ancient glaciers, towering forests, and rushing rivers. Curious beavers, magnificent bears, towering moose, and soaring bald eagles visited us. We witnessed an endless parade of wildlife against backdrops that seemed too spectacular to be real.

We met incredible people and, most importantly, we disconnected completely. Most of the time, there was no internet, and no phone service. In Alaska's summer, it never gets dark, not even for an hour. For an entire month, our only decisions were "where shall we go next?" and "what will we discover today?"

Although it was hard not to fish, kayak, or bike, being forced to slow down sharpened my focus on the experience itself. I learned to be genuinely present, to notice how a place impacted me, to feel the weight of silence, to appreciate the subtle shifts in light across a glacier face. You can read the full story p.??.

I guess the moral of this story is that sometimes, just stopping to smell the roses, really looking at the view, or breathing in that crisp mountain air is enough. In fact, it's more than enough. Sometimes we're so busy with the activity that we miss the beauty surrounding us. And that beauty, the memory of morning mist rising off a lake or the sight of a family of grizzly bears feeding, will impact you long after the adrenaline of any adventure fades.

Oh, and one more thing: don't just stop taking codeine all at once, or you'll find yourself starring in your own personal scene from Trainspotting.

Steve Dickinson / Editor

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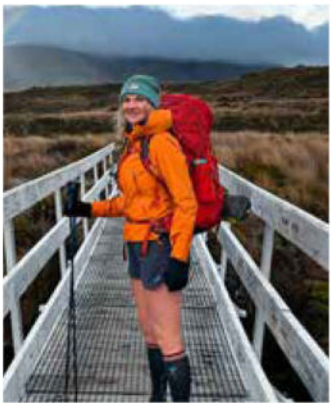

BEHIND THE COVER:
The cover of this issue of Adventure Magazine is a celebration of the women who are reshaping the adventure industry. For decades, outdoor pursuits and extreme sports were seen as a male domain, from mountain summits to remote trails and rugged coastlines. Today, women are not just participating; they are leading, innovating, and inspiring a new era of adventure. This is not a token shift; it is a dynamic, fast-growing movement that is changing how we view adventure, exploration, and business.This cover highlights a select few among the many women redefining what leadership looks like in adventure.

Sarah Hay, a notable climber and the owner of Northern Rocks, has built a climbing community that empowers people of all levels. Her commitment to breaking down barriers in climbing has created a space where inclusivity is as important as performance. In a sport traditionally dominated by men, Sarah's success is proof that skill, determination, and leadership transcend gender.

Emily Russell, owner of MD Outdoors, represents the rise of female entrepreneurs in the adventure world. Emily is part of a growing wave of women who are not just exploring the outdoors but creating the infrastructure and opportunities for others to do the same.

Gemma Wagstaff, designer and founder of Gemma Lee Wetsuits, has redefined what it means to create gear for women. Her vibrant, functional, and ethically made wetsuits challenge the outdated notion that performance gear must sacrifice style.

Beyond individual achievements, the growth of **World Expeditions'** women's groups highlights a broader trend: women are increasingly seeking adventure travel on their own terms. These journeys are about more than ticking destinations off a list; they're about empowerment, connection, and pushing physical and mental boundaries in supportive, like-minded groups.

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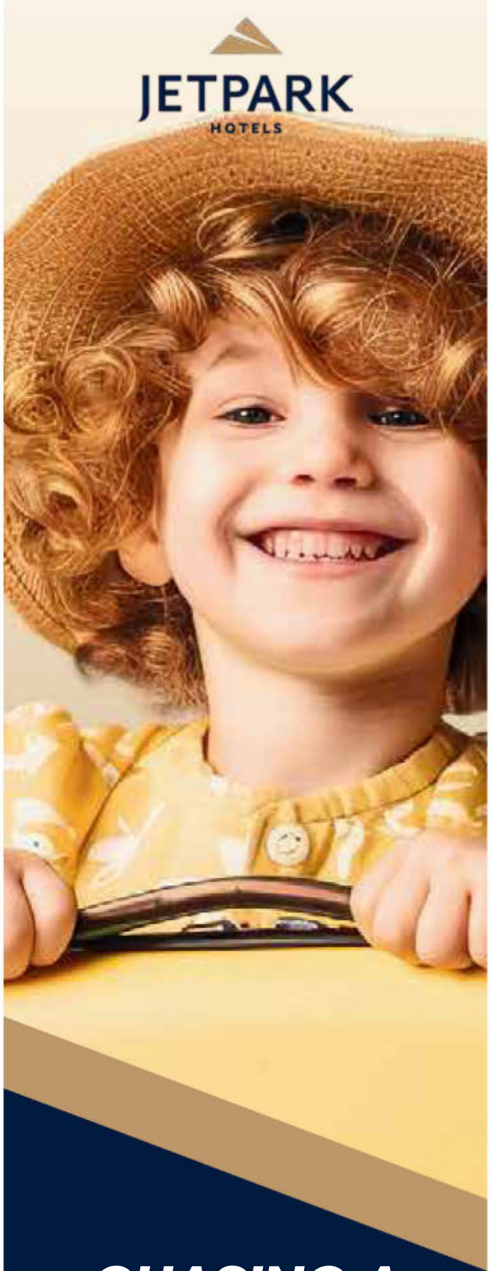

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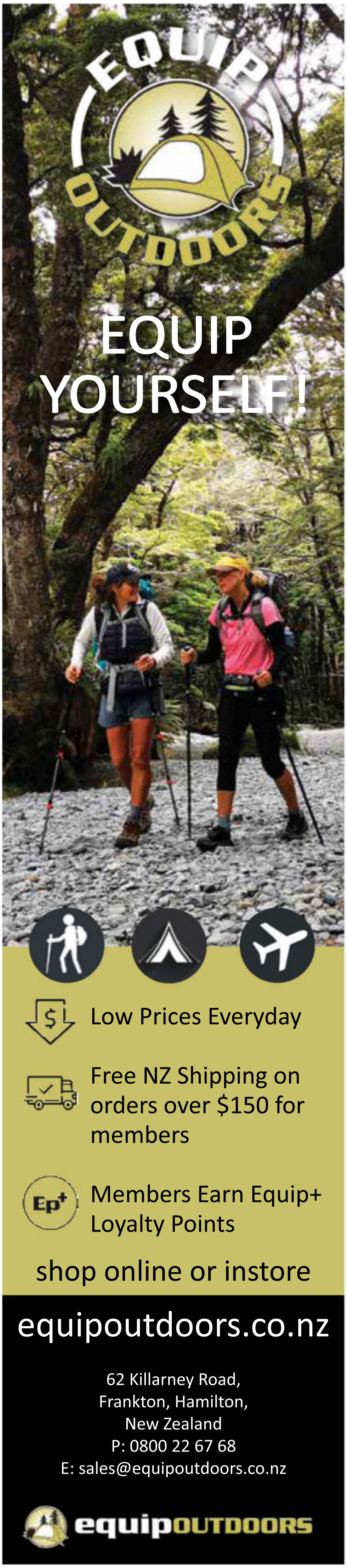
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FELIX BAUMGARTNER

GONE TOO SOON

As we go to print the adventure sports world is reeling from devastating news out of Italy, where Felix Baumgartner, Baumgartner who has appeared in Adventure magazine several times but in particular his daredevil first that captivated millions with his death defying stratospheric leap, has sadly been killed in a paragliding incident along the country's Adriatic coastline.

The 56 year old extreme athlete was operating a powered paraglider when tragedy struck near Porto Sant'Elpidio on Thursday. Emergency responders report that Baumgartner's aircraft plummeted into a hotel pool area, with the impact injuring a bystander who has since recovered.

Baumgartner's name became synonymous with extreme altitude after his unprecedented 2012 achievement that redefined human flight limits. Launching from a specialised pressure capsule positioned 39,014 metres above Earth's surface, he executed a freefall that shattered multiple records and captured global imagination.

The Austrian's descent reached supersonic velocities exceeding 1,357 kilometres per hour, making him the first human to break the sound barrier without mechanical assistance. His epic plunge lasted over four minutes before his parachute deployed, bringing him safely back to terra firma.

Long before his stratospheric fame, Baumgartner had established himself as one of BASE jumping's most fearless practitioners. His resume included death defying leaps from iconic structures worldwide, including Malaysia's Petronas Towers and Brazil's Christ the Redeemer statue (each jump pushing the envelope of what seemed humanly possible).

Red Bull, the energy drink company that sponsored Baumgartner's record breaking stratospheric mission, released an emotional tribute following news of his death:

> *"Felix embodied the spirit of human flight and relentlessly pursued new frontiers. His meticulous approach to extreme challenges, combined with his generous mentorship of fellow athletes, made him a beloved figure throughout our community. He lived to inspire others to push beyond perceived limitations."*

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MERRELL NZ ATHLETE WESTON HILL SELECTED TO JOIN MERRELL GLOBAL TRAIL RUNNING TEAM

Merrell New Zealand is proud to announce that Weston Hill, one of its top Merrell NZ Performance Team athletes, has been selected to join the Merrell Global Trail Running Team, making the leap from the local program to the brand's global roster of elite athletes.

This selection marks a major milestone in Merrell NZ's trail running journey. Over the past two years, the brand has invested heavily in creating a clear and structured pathway for Kiwi athletes to reach the global stage, a model rarely seen in New Zealand trail running and backed up through consistent support, race exposure, gear development, and community engagement.

Weston, a 33-year-old mechanical design engineer and mountain athlete based in Wellington, has stood out for his technical trail performance at home and overseas. His resume includes 3x New Zealand Trail Running Championship titles (2020, 2023 short trail and 2025), strong showings at the UTMB and Skyrunning World Series, and multiple representations of New Zealand at the Trail Running World Championships.

"This is a massive milestone for Weston, for our team, for Merrell and for trail running in Aotearoa," said Jose Matiz, Sales Manager at The Nevada Company and Manager of the Merrell NZ Performance Team. "We started this team to build something meaningful and long-term. Weston's selection shows it is working and it sends a powerful message to young athletes across the country that there is a real pathway in trail running, right here at home."

> *"It's super exciting and a privilege to be the first from the team selected as a global athlete for Merrell."*

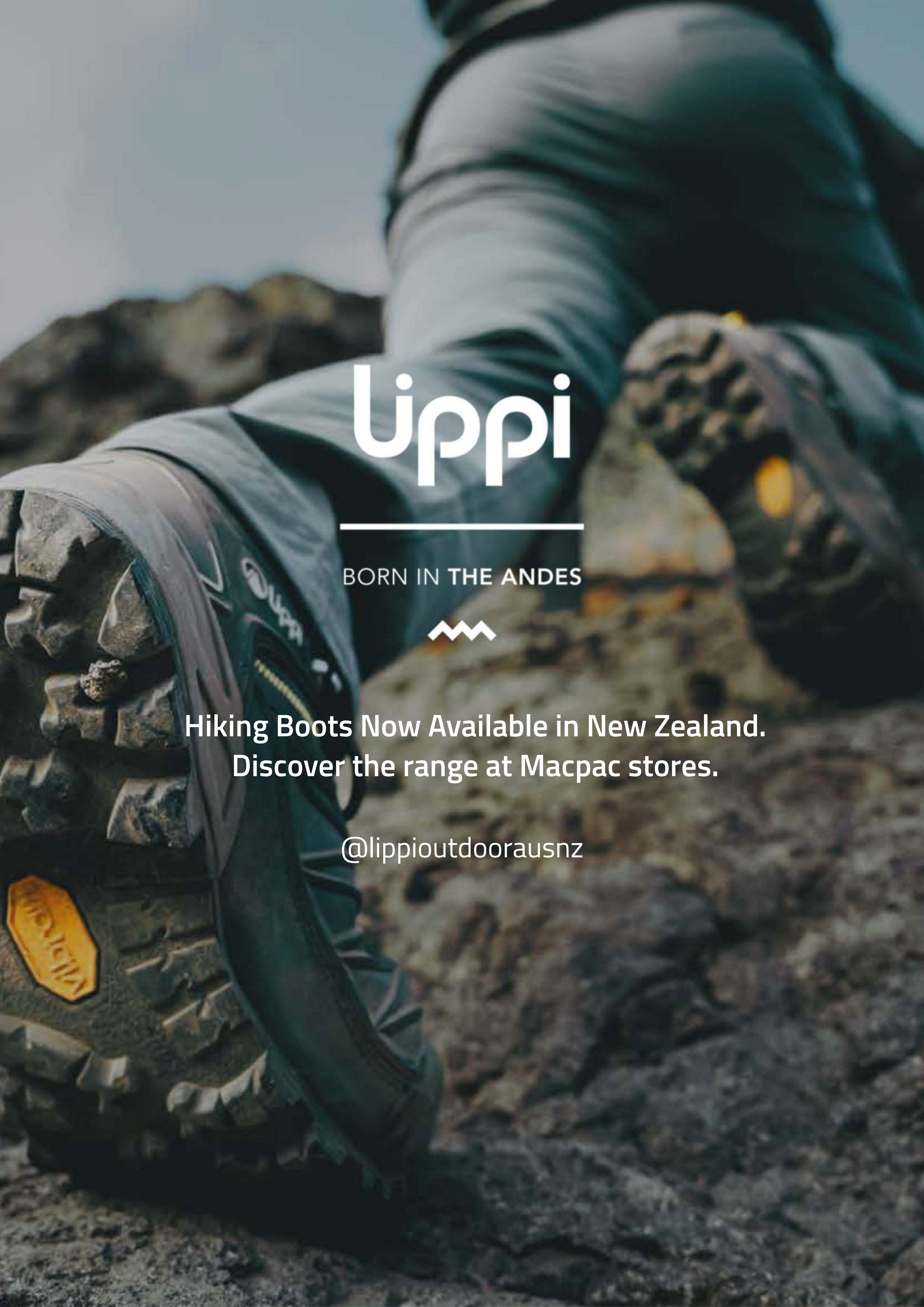
Weston added:
"Merrell New Zealand's pathway for athletes to join the global team is something special happening here in New Zealand. We haven't seen a mountain and trail running team this size or with this level of support here before. There is a broad range of athletes and backgrounds with a common team vision of athletic performance and growing the sport. In New Zealand, we've seen athletes jump straight to international teams, but Merrell is building a true pathway for Kiwi athletes to grow from local to global."

Ben Stark, Brand Manager at Merrell Global, commented: "We're thrilled to welcome Weston Hill to our global athlete team. His relentless drive and passion for pushing limits and exploring wild terrain inspires us and perfectly embodies the spirit of our team. The Merrell Trail Team is getting stronger every day, and Weston helps us take a great step forward in our goal to be the best trail running brand in the world. We look forward to supporting Weston in his racing goals."

The Merrell NZ Performance Team, launched in 2023, includes ten athletes (five women, five men) who balance competition with full-time work, studies, and family life. Members include Kate McDowell, Jessica Campbell, Katie Morgan, Sonja Vreugdenhil, Penny Mouat, Ben Williams, Sanjeev Deo, Michael Sutton, Sam Rout, and Weston Hill. All have achieved podium results, with several representing New Zealand on the international stage.

Alongside athlete development, Merrell NZ has established major partnerships to help grow the sport. These include a three-year naming rights deal with Merrell Race Tekapo, one of the fastest-growing trail events in New Zealand, and a new partnership with the Auckland Trail Run & Walk Series, helping expand the brand's reach in the North Island. The brand also works closely with community groups like Wild Things, Trailrunning NZ, Live 2 Run Trail, and several clubs across the country.
Backed by evolving product innovation and support from leading retailers like Kinisi, Frontrunner, Stride Performance, Shoe Clinic and more, the Merrell Trail Run category continues to gain momentum, and with it, opportunities for the next wave of New Zealand athletes.

"This is not just about Weston," added Matiz. "It is about showing what's possible. We hope this moment inspires the next generation of trail runners to chase their goals, and we are proud to keep supporting Weston every step of the way in this new chapter."
www.merrell.co.nz



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Nathan Fa'avae checking in at TA8

Image by Alexandre Socci

Image by Alexandre Socci

BRINGING GODZONE BACK

By Penny Simpson

When One NZ GODZONE announced its return in January this year, the response was a resounding "yes" from competitors, sponsors, friends, and global followers. As the most challenging and spectacular expedition adventure race in the world, the New Zealand event attracts hundreds of racers and reaches over one million people online each event.

World champion adventure racer Nathan Fa'avae said One NZ GODZONES return was beneficial for the sport domestically and internationally with New Zealand playing a leading role in the history of adventure racing.

"Seeing it back with new teams and young athletes coming through shows that the sport continues to evolve with the race continuing to have a lasting impact on people, communities and the sport itself," says Nathan. "It gives me confidence in where adventure racing is heading."

"To highlight the reach of this event in everyday situations, I'm often trying to explain what adventure racing is. After a bit of back-and-forth, people say Oh, you mean like GODZONE – so it's become the go-to reference. And not uncommonly, they'll add, 'Is that the one Ritchie McCaw does?' That recognition says a lot about how far the event's influence has spread; it's become a household name even among people who've never raced before."

One NZ GODZONE Chapter 12 is on the 27th November – 5th December 2025 in Marlborough under the directorship of the newly formed PURE ADVENTURE Charitable Trust. The group consists of past competitors, businesspeople, and high-profile sportspeople, including World Champion and former All Black captain Richie McCaw.

"One NZ GODZONE is recognized as an unparalleled world leader in the sports global community" says PURE ADVENTURE Charitable Trustee Rob Nichol.

"The Trust's aim is to build on the event's 10-year legacy, and to use the platform and momentum it creates to help underpin the accessibility and growth of multisport and adventure racing in New Zealand and the ability of people to safely and sustainably access the outdoors"

"Most of the trustees have raced the event and got so much out of it on a personal and sporting level that we wanted to see it return. We also appreciated how influential it is in terms of the sports pathways in New Zealand – it's truly aspirational and authentically showcases this amazing country, culture, and people."

He says Chapter 12 will highlight the incredible diversity of Marlborough, taking teams into uncharted territories in a region the race has never before explored.

"Marlborough has some of New Zealand's best adventurous locations that we are eager for teams to explore," says Rob. "There is an extensive network of stunning natural coastal waterways, peninsulas and islands alongside intricate coastal forests and ridges creating a myriad of options for a world-class course."

Support for the events return has been tenfold amongst commercial partners, local councils, RTOs, and the Department of Conservation.

"One NZ GODZONE presents one hell of a contest for the athletes taking it on, and we looked for partners to join this journey who recognise the unique challenge of competing in extreme conditions and terrain."

"New Zealand's leading telecom, One NZ, has returned as naming rights partner, and the regional host is Destination Marlborough and Marlborough District Council."

Iconic New Zealand-based outdoor clothing company Macpac has stepped up as the event's exclusive apparel and pack partner including equipping competitor race packs and volunteers with select outerwear, technical tees and accessories, as well as the coveted official One NZ GODZONE team race bibs.

"Macpac have an excellent reputation for quality, with their gear worn by generations of New Zealanders all over the globe. The company's high-quality production values speak to the type of gear required to keep warm, dry and comfortable in the outdoors. We all share similar aspirations around wanting to see New Zealanders and others access the outdoors while simultaneously showcasing the country via an inspirational expedition event experience."

Rickie McCaw at GODZONE - Image by Alexandre Socci

> *"One NZ GODZONE represents the ultimate New Zealand adventure that, over a five to eight day period, absolutely tests you both mentally and physically," says McCaw. "It's a gruelling and rewarding challenge – one of the toughest out there - where team dynamics are critical to everyone in your team crossing the finish line, which is something I personally enjoy. One NZ GODZONE has impacted my life in so many ways and continues to be an inspiration."*

"We have also recently been joined by NZCT, New Zealand's largest gaming trust, as a strategic partner. They contribute to local communities, particularly in the area of amateur sport and active participation and recognize the wider aspirations that the PURE ADVENTURE charitable trust has in this space."

Former All Blacks captain Richie McCaw, who has competed in four chapters of One NZ GODZONE, is part of the team front-footing the new PURE ADVENTURE Charitable Trust to ensure One NZ GODZONE returns to its glory days.

WILL YOU BE ON THE CHAPTER 12 STARTLINE?
Entries for One NZ GODZONE Chapter 12 are open until the 31st October, 2025, with teams of four (at least one female) able to enter online at:
www.godzoneadventure.com

"All the entry details are there along with extensive information about what your team can expect at the race, the rules and regulations," says Rob Nichol. "For those competitors looking for a team to join or requiring additional team members, we can help out. Just click the contact link and let us know what you need."

"What I would say to those teams seeking to take on the ultimate challenge and complete the full Chapter 12 GZ Pure expedition adventure is that it will reward you in ways that no other can," says Nichol. " For others who may not have as much experience or confidence, then the GZ Pursuit category is perfectly set to provide you with a spectacular adventure through New Zealand's outdoors, experiencing places and sights others can only dream of."

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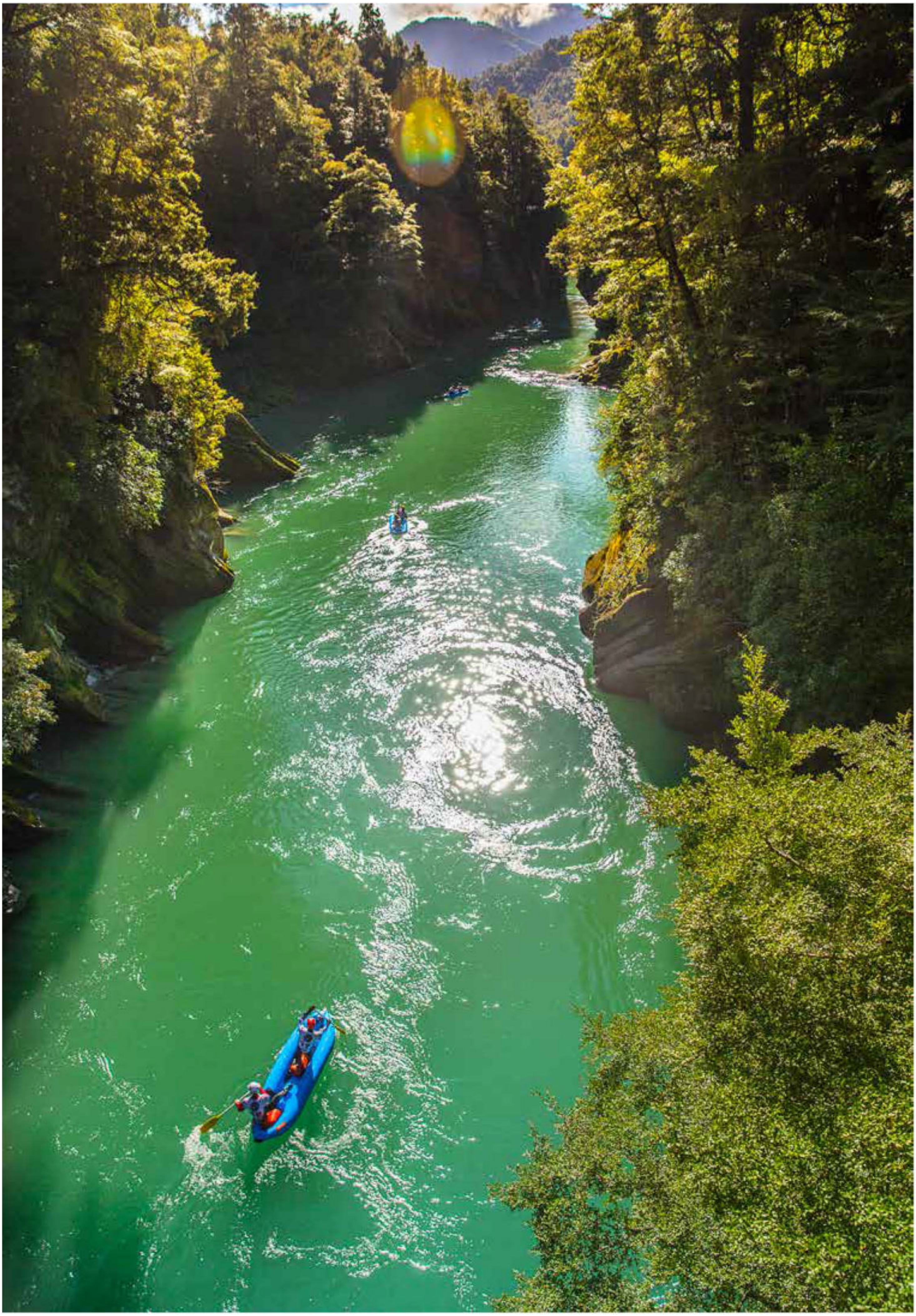
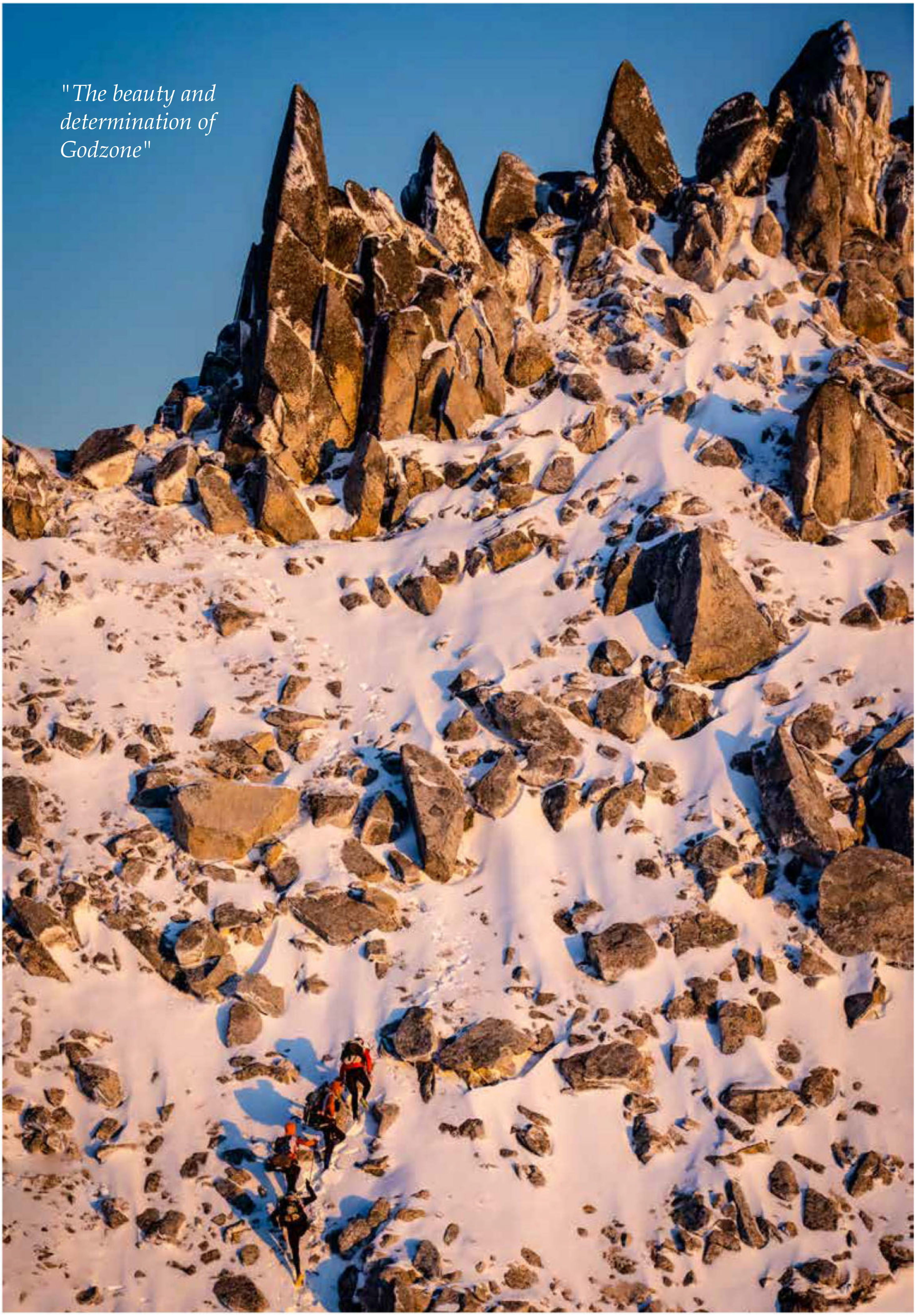




"The beauty and determination of Godzone"

PHOEBE KENDERDINE, QUEEN OF CHOSS:

Meet the climbing guru of the next generation nipping at the current one's heels

Words by Derek Cheng
Photos by Jake Townsend and Nate Warburton

Phoebe Kenderdine has a t-shirt that declares her the Queen of Choss, a recognition of her mastery over Wanaka rock.

It actually says Princess of Choss, but with the "Princess" crossed out and replaced with "Queen". This is perhaps a reference to her youth, as well as her climbing prowess; the 22-year-old was promised the title if she climbed Wanaka's hardest route, Sunshine, a grade 32 crimp-fest up a wall that slightly and consistently overhangs for 35 metres.

Established in 2020 by local pioneer and schist-master Jon Sedon, Sunshine combines the hardest part of three individual routes. It's the crowning line on Al Cap, the best wall of Wanaka schist - known endearingly among locals as "choss" - so it seemed apt for Sedon to be gifted a King of Choss t-shirt. (Sedon graded it 31, but this is considered something of a locals' joke.)

Sunshine repelled all would-be conquerors until Kenderdine climbed it earlier this year. It was season number two for Kenderdine. She'd tried it at the end of the previous summer after ticking most of the crag, as well as establishing a climb of her own: Caffeine, grade 31, which shares its top section with Sunshine.

At the time, she described the crux of Sunshine as "minging on a small crimpy rail - there's no feet - and then The Big Throw".

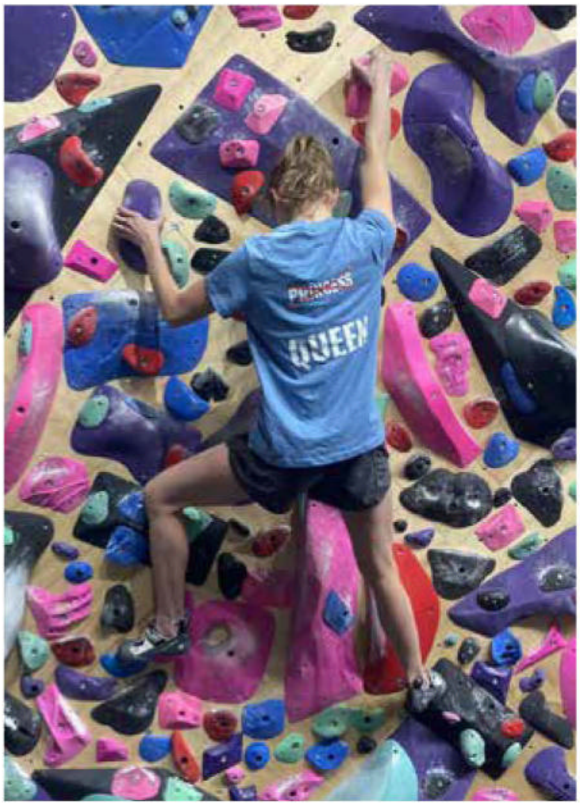
"I was mentally and physically over it at the end of last summer. I had tendonitis in both my elbows. I was done," she says of round one.

Local legend Lionel Clay then told Kenderdine a Queen of Choss t-shirt awaited her successful ascent of Sunshine. Was this the perfect incentive?

Returning this summer, she took only four sessions to complete it. Her secret? Not so much the t-shirt as strength training on the bouldering wall known as the Moonboard.

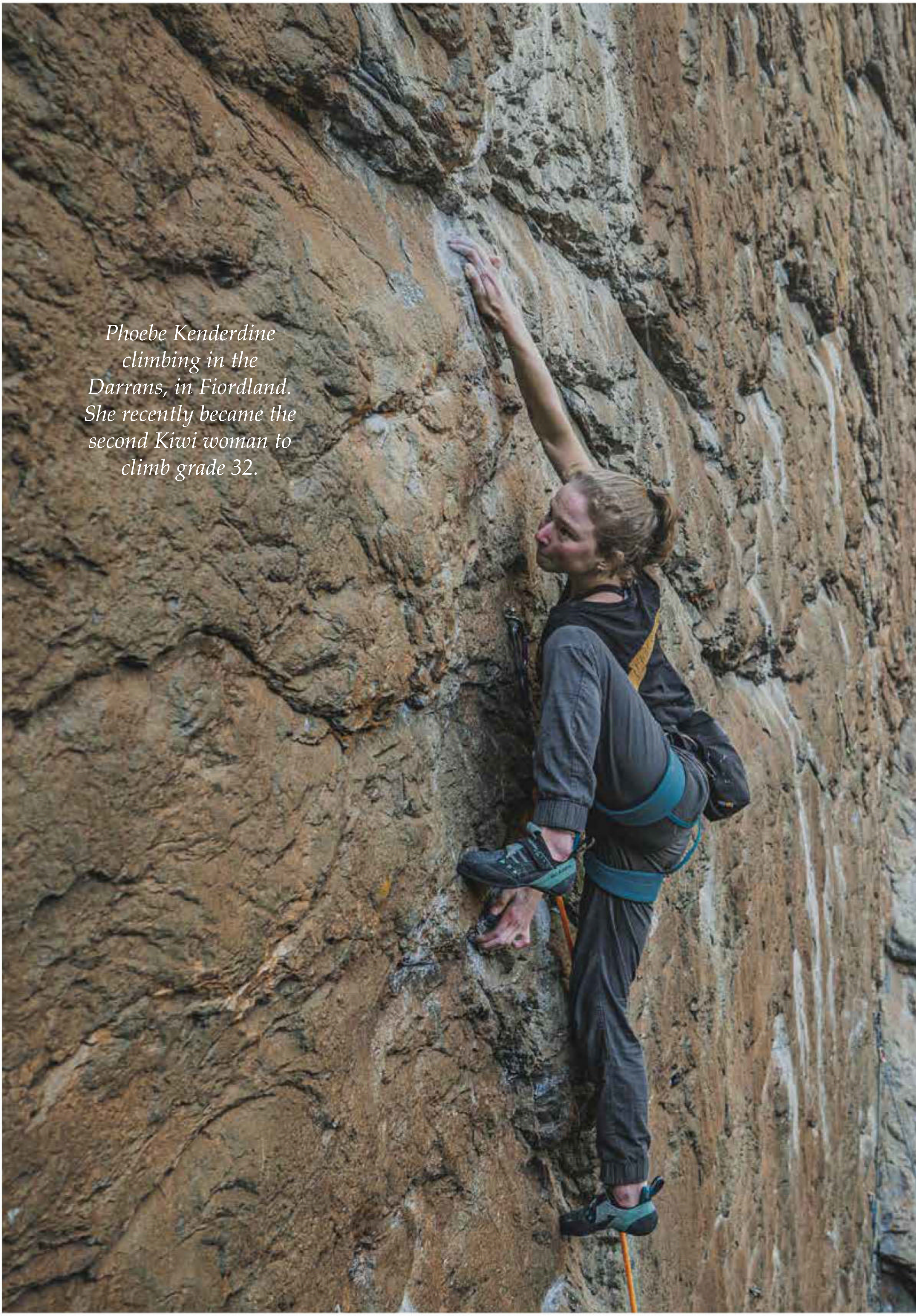
"I'd spent the entire year on the Moonboard. I was just stronger," she says. "I discovered there wasn't a Big Throw, actually, or at least I didn't have to do one. The crux happened to be one of the things that I'm best at - locking off really hard on a tiny crimp on one hand, and reaching really far with the other."

Her success on Sunshine was slightly accidental. "I was planning on going up and extending some draws because the clipping positions were not great. But then I pulled through the crux. I then had to remember the sequence for the top of Caffeine, which I hadn't done for a year."



Phoebe Kenderdine's recent success on Wanaka schist has led to her being gifted a 'Queen of choss' t-shirt.

Right: Phoebe Kenderdine showing her expert technique for the Wanaka jiggle - crimp, step up, reach up, crimp.



Phoebe Kenderdine climbing in the Darrans, in Fiordland. She recently became the second Kiwi woman to climb grade 32.

Sunshine was meant to take her all summer. Instead she spent more time at the hallowed crags of Babylon and Little Babylon in the Darrans, Fiordland, where she ticked Xerxes (30), Fuel (29) and No Country for Old Men (29).

On her last trip, on only her third day working the route, she did Blood Meridien (32), cementing her place among New Zealand's climbing elite as the second Kiwi woman (after Mayan Smith-Gobat) to climb this grade. A third, Beka Burbery, has since joined them after also climbing Blood Meridien.

Smith-Gobat remains the only New Zealand woman to climb grade 33. Kenderdine has her sights set on reaching, and even surpassing, that bar.

A familiar pattern emerged on her regular trips to the Darrans: falling from the top of her objective on the last day of the trip, and heading home frustrated - but motivated to return.

“I went to the Darrans for a week and did Fuel, but fell off No Country For Old Men. I was really annoyed about that. When I went back and did No Country, I tried Xerxes just for a laugh. I thought it'd be way too hard for me, and on the last day of the trip, I dropped the top of Xerxes.

“So then another week went past, and I thought, 'I need to go back and do Xerxes.' And when I did Xerxes, on the last day of the trip, I fell off the top of Blood Meridian. I was like, 'I refuse to do this for the third time in a row, falling off another climb and going home empty-handed. I have done this too many times already.'” She tied in one more time, and sent it.

But this shows she is not immune to frustrations erupting to the surface in the form of an explosive huff.

“I expect very big things from myself, and I can be really hard on myself. I do throw the odd tantrum.

“I apologised to everyone who was at the crag when I dropped the top of Xerxes, and when I dropped the top of Blood Meridian. I was not happy. I genuinely screamed.”

It’s a fine balance, which she is tip-toeing, to care enough about the outcome to push herself hard, but not so hard that it might have a negative impact on her usually sunny disposition.

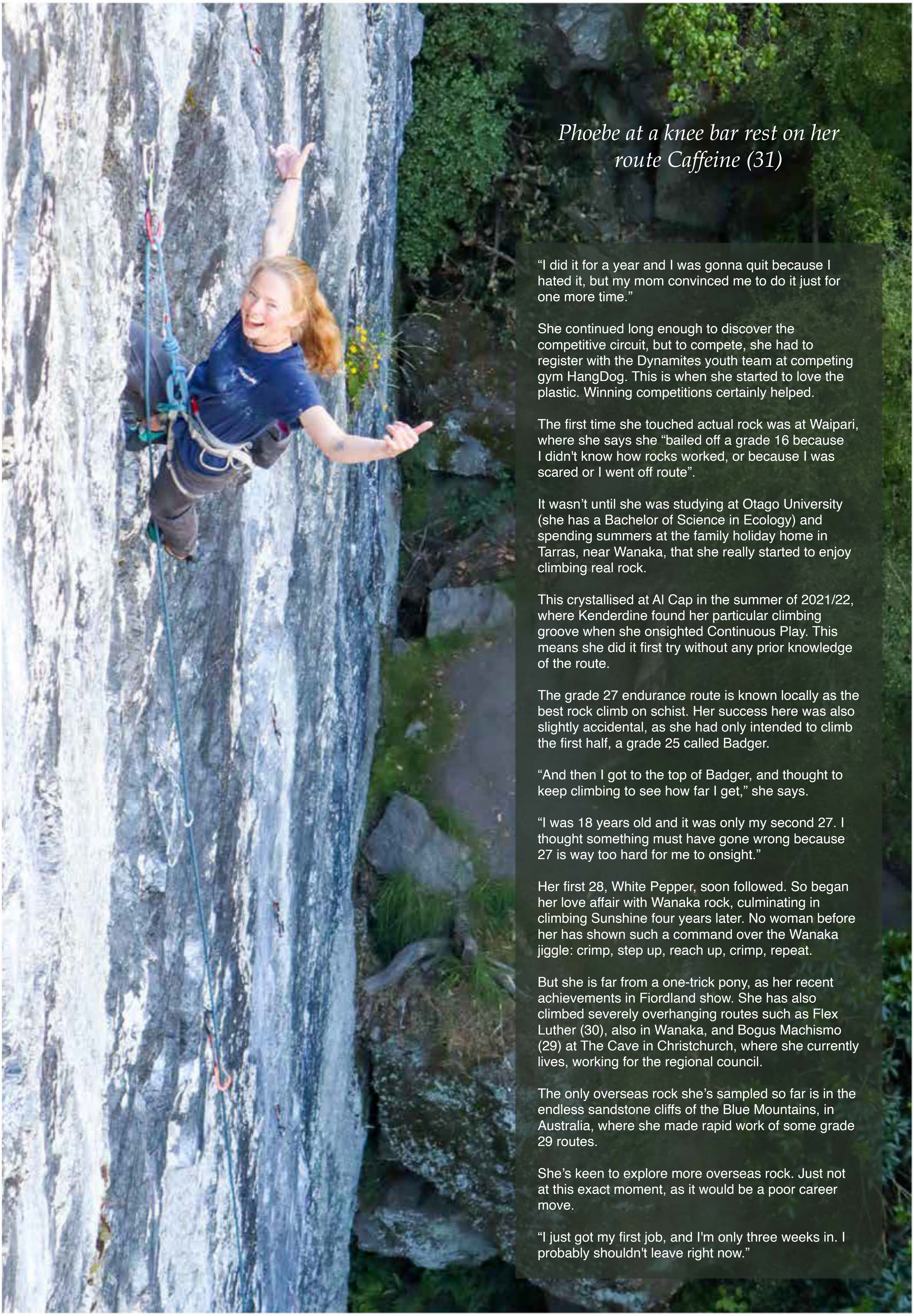
There’s no climbing pedigree in her family, nor has she grown into the sport with any particular mentors beyond the coaches in her youth climbing teams. So it’s an area she’s exploring more or less on her own.

What would she tell her 15-year-old self, or a young girl climber who looked up to her and what she’s achieved?

“Be kinder to yourself. Don’t expect to be the best at everything all the time. It's OK to not be the best, to climb the hardest.”

Kenderdine is part of a new generation of climbers who developed their love of the sport on plastic, rather than real rock.

It was far from love at first sight. Her first introduction was at her own 10th birthday party at Fergs climbing gym in Wellington, which prompted her to join the kid’s climbing club there.



Phoebe at a knee bar rest on her route Caffeine (31)

"I did it for a year and I was gonna quit because I hated it, but my mom convinced me to do it just for one more time."

She continued long enough to discover the competitive circuit, but to compete, she had to register with the Dynamites youth team at competing gym HangDog. This is when she started to love the plastic. Winning competitions certainly helped.

The first time she touched actual rock was at Waipari, where she says she "bailed off a grade 16 because I didn't know how rocks worked, or because I was scared or I went off route".

It wasn't until she was studying at Otago University (she has a Bachelor of Science in Ecology) and spending summers at the family holiday home in Tarras, near Wanaka, that she really started to enjoy climbing real rock.

This crystallised at Al Cap in the summer of 2021/22, where Kenderdine found her particular climbing groove when she onsighted Continuous Play. This means she did it first try without any prior knowledge of the route.

The grade 27 endurance route is known locally as the best rock climb on schist. Her success here was also slightly accidental, as she had only intended to climb the first half, a grade 25 called Badger.

"And then I got to the top of Badger, and thought to keep climbing to see how far I get," she says.

"I was 18 years old and it was only my second 27. I thought something must have gone wrong because 27 is way too hard for me to onsight."

Her first 28, White Pepper, soon followed. So began her love affair with Wanaka rock, culminating in climbing Sunshine four years later. No woman before her has shown such a command over the Wanaka jiggle: crimp, step up, reach up, crimp, repeat.

But she is far from a one-trick pony, as her recent achievements in Fiordland show. She has also climbed severely overhanging routes such as Flex Luther (30), also in Wanaka, and Bogus Machismo (29) at The Cave in Christchurch, where she currently lives, working for the regional council.

The only overseas rock she's sampled so far is in the endless sandstone cliffs of the Blue Mountains, in Australia, where she made rapid work of some grade 29 routes.

She's keen to explore more overseas rock. Just not at this exact moment, as it would be a poor career move.

"I just got my first job, and I'm only three weeks in. I probably shouldn't leave right now."

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INSPIRING ADVENTURERS:

Compiled by Eric Skilling

People are often our inspiration. I have enjoyed the company of these four adventurers for many years now. Each has dared to challenge themselves, and as they describe, achieved way beyond what they thought was possible. Hopefully, their stories of courage, daring, and determination will inspire others to get out adventuring.

> *Remember to take time to immerse yourself in your surroundings and enjoy being with nature…. It's not a race.*

ANNETTE: carabiners, crampons, children and other challenges

I love the outdoors…I'll trade a trip to the shopping mall for a walk along a muddy track any day. Credit goes to my parents, especially my mother, who nurtured our interest in nature. I guess not everyone's mother is one of NZ's leading ornithological artists. We were lucky to accompany her, sketchbook in hand, on many great adventures.

Completing the Lake Waikaremoana Track, a birthday gift from husband Chris, was my first multi-day tramp. Despite overweight packs stuffed with way too much gear, including a sleeping bag that compressed down to something like a 10-gallon drum, I was hooked. We upgraded to more lightweight gear and haven't stopped tramping since.

All tramps have their WOW moments; however, 4 days tramping on the Tasman Glacier is up there as a favourite. It was so different – 5 of us roped together, up on the glacier, surrounded by white, crisp cold. Soundless, except for the click of carabiner and crampons, and occasional distant thunder of avalanches.

My loves - going downhill! Not so much love for the steep uphill, although this is rewarded with, as Ricki Baker would say, a "majestical" view, the satisfaction of knowing you can push yourself way outside your comfort zone, and beyond your goals. A hot tea under a clear starry sky is priceless, as is drifting off to sleep to the sound of kiwi and morepork, waking to spectacular sunrises and the "dawn Chorus". I love being in pristine bush with the birds, but I also love a wild West Coast beach.

Joining a tramping club helps immensely. We enjoy the company and encouragement of like-minded people and not organising trips. Get yourself a pair of well-fitting boots, a good raincoat, and join a tramping club. Don't be afraid to take children or grandchildren. Our first grandchild, Suzie, had her first adventure above the treeline when she was 6 weeks old! Hopefully, she and brother Liam will also care for nature as much as their great grandmother. Above all, remember to take time to immerse yourself in your surroundings and enjoy being with nature…. It's not a race.

ARLETTA: from the Netherlands to French Ridge Hut

As a family, growing up in the Netherlands, we spent many Sundays outdoors enjoying nature. Once a year, we would holiday in Austria or anywhere else in the Alps. I remember clearly that I loved the mountains and had big plans to reach those peaks one day.

Fast forward a few years, and my partner and I moved to New Zealand for its nature and slower pace of life. I did a few of the Great Walks with friends visiting from overseas but struggled to get out by myself. My partner is not into tramping, and building up a network of like-minded people takes time. Fortunately, while searching the internet, I came across a trip to Great Barrier Island posted by the local tramping club.

This was a trip I would not have undertaken alone. Being part of the club is a safe and much more enjoyable experience. I have since explored parts of New Zealand I would otherwise have never visited. I learned heaps of tramping skills and met some great people. There is also the option of going out every Sunday with a group, which is always well organised, including transport, perfect for me.

Yearly trips to the South Island have been highlights. I do like the challenge of multi-day tramps, out of ‘cell reception’ and immersed in nature for days. I have many good memories of Arthur's Pass, Fjordland, and Aspiring National Park. Admittedly, a few of them I enjoyed more ‘looking back’, knowing how I struggled in the moment, like walking up to French Ridge Hut. However, you are always rewarded with amazing views. By far the coolest, somewhat scary event was the descent off Avalanche Peak, Arthur's Pass. The steep 700-meter scree slope into the Crow Valley was one of those places that I am pleased to have been but will never choose to do again. The club for sure got me over some challenging tops and passes.

Personally, getting out into the wilderness and being an ‘active relaxer’ is an important form of self-care. I am a counsellor, and being out and about is the best way to unwind and clear my brain in the company of some great people.

JACQUELINE: ocean swimmer, cyclist, runner, and tramper

I am a relative newcomer to club tramping, having become a member at the beginning of 2022. Listening to a work colleague recounting stories of her adventures inspired me to take the plunge and sign up. She was very involved at the time, being an active tramper and member of the Committee. Joining a club also allowed me to enjoy the company of more experienced trampers, to learn from them, as well as explore different places around the country.

My first multi-day tramp with the club was over the Christmas period in 2022 to Rees-Dart and other tracks in Mount Aspiring National Park, northwest of Queenstown in the South Island - a great baptism to the ups and downs of back-country tramping, Department of Conservation huts and dehydrated meals.

I was already quite active being an all-year-round ocean swimmer, runner (well I run), cyclist, and have recently taken up golf at an Ambrose level! Taking on the Rees-Dart circuit was a good challenge to begin with, particularly the climb up to Dart Hut at the Cascade Saddle.

One of the destinations for last year’s Club Christmas trip was French Ridge hut, also in Mount Aspiring National Park. It was a steep climb up to the hut at 1480m, just below the snowline. Especially exhilarating was sleeping in my tent (which I prefer to sleeping in the huts), expecting to be blown away at any minute, looked on by the beautiful, but at times, disturbingly curious kea.

I enjoy the physical challenge of tramping; taking time out from the usual comforts which come to be expected; the camaraderie of tramping fellows; the ‘wow’ scenery seen and loos with a view; the friendly robins encountered; the unexpected things that happen along the way, weather notwithstanding; not having to make any decisions about what I am going to have for breakfast, lunch, or dinner except which dehydrated meal to open at the end of the day.

Karen reaching the peaks of Machu picchu with school friends

"Tramping has taught me that I like to push myself. Despite often intoning to myself,"why!", as I pull on wet socks, head out in inclement weather, or tackle tough terrain, I know I will keep tramping until I am no longer capable."

KAREN: the gardener who reached Base Camp

My tramping journey began by accident back in 2016 at a 125th School Anniversary Reunion. There was a strong contingent from my Class of '75, and discussions over the celebratory dinner moved to plans for upcoming significant birthdays, most of us were approaching our 60th's. Crazily, when my friend Lucy said she wanted to reach Everest Base Camp, I found myself raising my hand and saying, "I would love to do that too!". Crazy because I had never given such an undertaking a moment's thought. I am an active gardener and urban walker, but no tramper! My solitary tramp had been the Tongariro Crossing, wearing borrowed boots, as a school prefect.

Alas, the following June, an email arrived from Lucy; it was time to put up or shut up. An October departure loomed. I joined a gym for the first time in my life, and the local tramping club. Relationships were formed with gym equipment, the Big Yellow NSTC bus, and Bivouac Outdoor. My first trip, the Muriwai-Te Henga Walkway was a serious challenge, but I was saved from disgrace when a fellow tramper gave me a walking pole.

Amazingly, I got to Base Camp on 18 November with my two schoolmates, the absolute highlight of my tramping life. Coming across an Ad Astra memorial (our school motto) on the Thukla Pass was a prophetic moment. The following year, two of us completed the high-altitude Salcantay Trail (aka Savage Mountain) in Peru before completing the Classic Inca to Machu Picchu.

My happy place is tucked up in my tent after a hard day. Adventuring with like-minded members makes experiences even more enjoyable.

There have been serious challenges, watching my tent-fly disappear into the distance on Mt Titiroa in Fjordland, and sinking in mud up to my thighs on Rakiura. Regardless, I plait my hair, don my special tramping shirt, and always head back out again.

Tramping has taught me that I like to push myself. Despite often intoning to myself,"why!", as I pull on wet socks, head out in inclement weather, or tackle tough terrain, I know I will keep tramping until I am no longer capable.

Karen's intruduction to tramping was to reach base camp

Karen reaching her first goal tramping. Base Camp.

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EREWHON AWAKENING

Five Days of Ski Touring in the Heart of the Rangitata

Words by Elke Braun-Elwert

We meet in the warm, timbered lounge of Mt Potts Lodge as a southerly storm slaps against the windows. Jen brings out a tray of hot drinks and homemade snacks while the group slowly arrives — boots still damp from the walk across the car park. It's the kind of welcome that instantly sets the tone: calm, generous, and grounded in the high country spirit. We pore over maps by the fire and watch the snow fall outside. Tomorrow, if the skies clear, we fly.

We're heading into the upper reaches of the Rangitata, just below the Main Divide, to a new alpine hut that's been years in the dreaming. Erewhon Hut sits tucked into a basin below Mt Potts, perched at the head of a long winding valley that once echoed with the sound of helicopters and happy skiers during the heyday of the Erewhon Heli Park in the '80s and '90s. There was even a rope tow once, and if you look closely, you can still spot some of the pylons. The old Erewhon Ski Area and its quirky, short-lived seasons are now only stories shared between those who remember — but some of the same terrain now lies just a skin-track away from our new home.

Potts Range, Southern Alps

Malcolm Prouting, our pilot, greets us with a grin and his usual dry wit. A seasoned high country aviator, Malcolm has been flying these valleys longer than most of us could ski and threads his machine through the high country like it's an extension of his own limbs. And of course, he learnt to ski on the Erewhon rope tow back in the day. "Weather's holding," he says, "but you won't want to hang around too long on that ridge."

From the air, the landscape unfolds in wide sweeps: braided rivers turned to ice, wide cirques filled with fresh snow, and spiny ridgelines linking unnamed peaks. The hut appears suddenly beneath us — small, compact, and perfectly placed. From the outside, Erewhon Hut is humble, clad in red with a steep snow-shedding roof. But step inside, and you see the craft.

Every detail has been considered: gear drying space that actually works, boot room separated from sleeping, double-glazed windows that frame the peaks, and a stove that turns ice cold spring water to tea in minutes. The design reflects years of hut-life experience and a deep understanding of what ski tourers really need. It's the kind of place that immediately becomes a home.

Erewhon Hut, Potts Range, Southern Alps

Over the next five days, we ski lines that feel like they've been waiting for us. Smooth, aesthetic descents roll from alpine summits into hanging valleys. South-facing bowls offer steep freeride terrain with long, clean runouts — reminiscent of the area's heli-skiing past — while mellow glades let us link turns all the way back to the hut door. There's something here for everyone: summit-to-valley descents, technical couloirs, and lazy powder laps in the late afternoon sun. We earn each one with skins and sweat.

Evenings are spent around the stove, drying and mending gear and sharing stories. The group settles into a rhythm: big climbs, long runs, hut-life, repeat. The sense of isolation is complete — we don't see another soul all week.

The walk out is no afterthought. Weather closes in again and with it, the helicopter stays grounded. So we shoulder packs and ski the upper reaches of the old Erewhon access road before the real challenge begins: navigating slips, washouts, and scree as the snow turns to rock. The final kilometers take grit and determination. But as we round the last corner and see the windbreaks of Mt Potts Lodge on the flats below, there's a quiet satisfaction in our group. We've moved through country few get to experience, slept under mountains that don't have names, and shared something rare: a taste of the old high country — unfiltered, real, and hard-earned.

About the Author: Elke Braun-Elwert

Elke Braun-Elwert grew up in the mountains—literally. Daughter of legendary mountaineer and guide Gottlieb Braun-Elwert and Kiwi adventurer Anne Braun-Elwert, she was raised in the Mackenzie Basin, where adventure was a way of life. From an early age, she was exploring the Southern Alps on skis and foot, helping carry supplies into remote huts, and soaking up the knowledge and quiet determination that defines her family's legacy.

Today, Elke is one of New Zealand's few female IFMGA-qualified mountain and ski guides—a globally recognised certification that takes years of commitment and serious time in the backcountry. She guides ski traverses, alpine climbs and trekking trips across Aotearoa, and plays a key role in running Alpine Recreation, the Tekapo-based guiding company her parents founded in 1981.

Elke has led numerous trips along the Symphony on Skis route—an iconic alpine traverse her father pioneered, across the Southern Alps from the headwaters of Lake Tekapo to the West Coast—and is passionate about making the mountains more accessible for women. She runs women's-only courses such as She's on Skis and She's on Spikes, designed to give women the skills and confidence to get into the backcountry in a supportive environment.

When she's not guiding or running Alpine Recreation, Elke is often out exploring with her young family or helping with her husband's custom bike-packing gear business (Robo-Kiwi Bikepacking Bags). With a calm, practical style and deep roots in the high country, she's helping shape the future of mountain guiding in Aotearoa—just like her parents did before her.

If you're keen to go on a trip with Elke, check out the great adventures on the Alpine Recreation website: https://alpinerecreation.com or book a ski tour in the Cass Valley: https://alpinerecreation.com/new-zealand-backcountry-skiing-and-split-boarding/the-best-freeride-ski-touring-and-split-boarding-adventures-in-new-zealand/cass-valley-ski-touring-and-split-boarding

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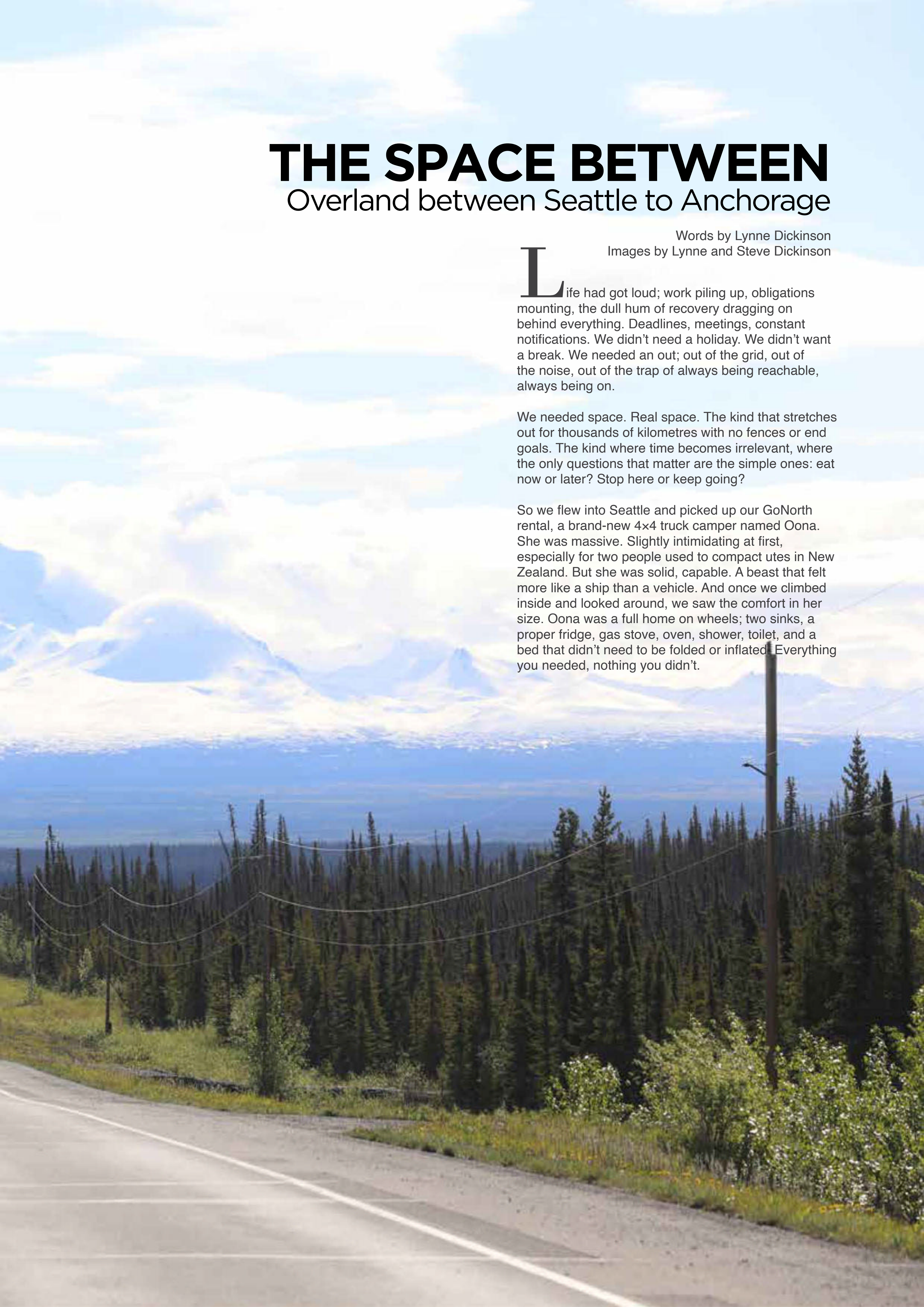

THE SPACE BETWEEN

Overland between Seattle to Anchorage

Words by Lynne Dickinson
Images by Lynne and Steve Dickinson

Life had got loud; work piling up, obligations mounting, the dull hum of recovery dragging on behind everything. Deadlines, meetings, constant notifications. We didn't need a holiday. We didn't want a break. We needed an out; out of the grid, out of the noise, out of the trap of always being reachable, always being on.

We needed space. Real space. The kind that stretches out for thousands of kilometres with no fences or end goals. The kind where time becomes irrelevant, where the only questions that matter are the simple ones: eat now or later? Stop here or keep going?

So we flew into Seattle and picked up our GoNorth rental, a brand-new 4×4 truck camper named Oona. She was massive. Slightly intimidating at first, especially for two people used to compact utes in New Zealand. But she was solid, capable. A beast that felt more like a ship than a vehicle. And once we climbed inside and looked around, we saw the comfort in her size. Oona was a full home on wheels; two sinks, a proper fridge, gas stove, oven, shower, toilet, and a bed that didn't need to be folded or inflated. Everything you needed, nothing you didn't.

Miles Canyon, Whitehorse, Yukon

Our route was loosely sketched. From Seattle, up to Vancouver Island to see friends, then north through British Columbia via the legendary Stewart–Cassiar Highway, cutting through the Yukon and into Alaska. That was the framework. But almost immediately, the plan began to dissolve in the best possible way.

Because as the road stretched out in front of us, so did the freedom to let go. To make decisions not based on a schedule but on instinct. A shift in weather. A better feeling. A road we hadn't noticed on the map. These became our signposts. And without realising it at first, we weren't chasing destinations, we were following stillness.

We quickly discovered the quiet joy of boondocking (freedom camping). In three weeks, we only stayed at a single paid campsite once. The rest of the time? We parked wild. By turquoise rivers, beneath craggy glaciers, next to mirror-still lakes. An unspoken rule of the road: if there isn't a sign saying "no camping," it means you can. That simple.

One of our first real hits of awe came between Vancouver and Lillooet. There was no single standout sight, just a rolling series of natural beauty that demanded no explanation. Towering mountains that rose up suddenly and sharply from the ocean. Rivers slicing through the land, vivid and glacier-fed. Lakes the kind of impossible blue you only see on postcards or in dreams. Snow still clung to the mountain shoulders in early summer, a reminder that this place belonged to the wild, not to the weather.

> *"As the road stretched out in front of us, so did the freedom to let go. To make decisions not based on a schedule but on instinct."*

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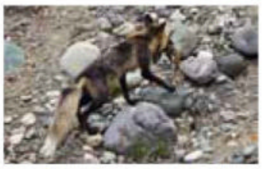
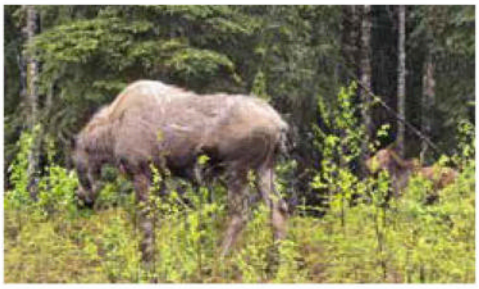


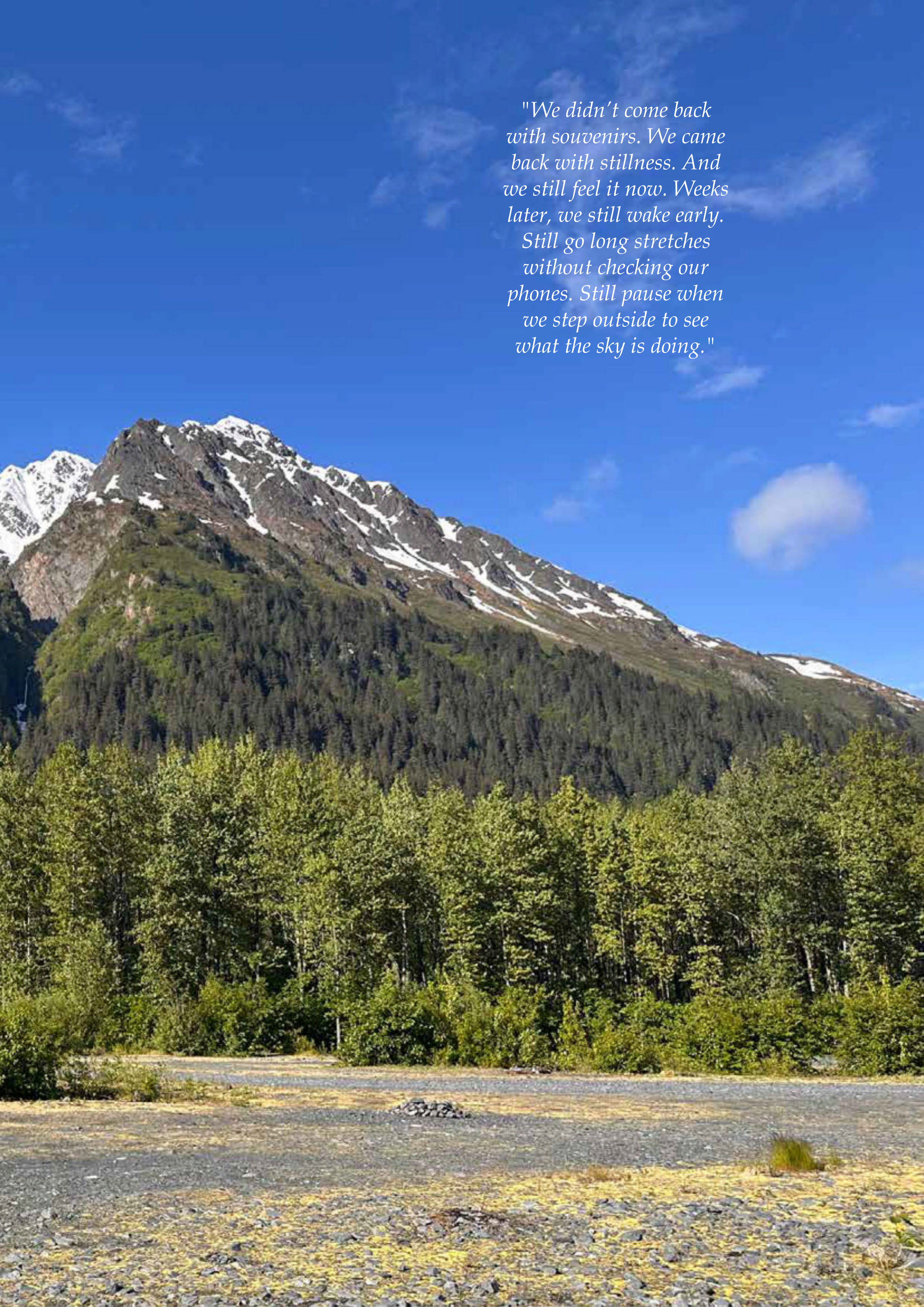


Met some interesting creatures along the way

Some days we drove for hours, chasing the sun, chasing the edge of the map. Other days, we moved less than fifty kilometres. A pull-off with a view that caught us. A bear sighting that made us stop and stare. A patch of wildflowers too perfect to drive past. With no reception and no reason to rush, the now became everything. We slipped into a rhythm that felt more natural than anything we'd known in years: stop when it feels right, stay as long as it feels good, leave when you're ready. The road would still be there tomorrow.

> *"We slipped into a rhythm that felt more natural than anything we'd known in years: stop when it feels right, stay as long as it feels good, leave when you're ready."*

Then came the Stewart–Cassiar Highway. A name we had circled on maps and underlined in guidebooks. But no research could prepare us for what it was really like. Wild. Remote. Vast. The kind of place where animals outnumber people and silence rules. We saw two bears and an elk within the first hour. Further north, a red fox emerged along the treeline, graceful and fleeting. Bald eagles soared overhead, their wings cutting sharp lines in the sky. Once, at dusk, we saw a figure in the distance,maybe a wolf, maybe a cayote? It didn't matter. These moments weren't checklist sightings. They were encounters; real, unscripted, and unforgettable.



"We didn't come back with souvenirs. We came back with stillness. And we still feel it now. Weeks later, we still wake early. Still go long stretches without checking our phones. Still pause when we step outside to see what the sky is doing."

Matanuska Glacier, Alaska

Hubbard Glacier, Seward, Alaska

Halibut capital of the world, Homer, Alaska

Eventually, the signal dropped for good. No bars. No pings. Just silence. At first, it was unnerving. We'd grown used to the low hum of digital life, the constant drip-feed of updates, news, messages. But once it was gone, we felt something else: relief. Like a fuse had been pulled and our brains reset. We hadn't realised how much attention that constant feed had been stealing until it was no longer there. Suddenly, we were awake. Not hyperactive, just deeply present. We watched clouds build and dissolve over ridgelines. Heard the pitch of tyres change as gravel gave way to mud. Felt the cold air more sharply in the morning. Out here, you don't need a reason to pay attention. It just happens.

Mornings began slowly. Always. No alarms. No need. The quiet whistle of the kettle meant it was time to get up.

Eventually, we reached Alaska. But even then, it didn't feel like a destination. It felt like an extension. Like we hadn't arrived, we had simply continued. The road between Glennallen and Palmer was especially unforgettable. A stretch where the land seemed to breathe on its own. Mountains closed in on both sides, glaciers spilling out from their folds. The sky opened wide above, blue and high and endless. The silence wasn't empty, it was full. Heavy, even. You couldn't capture it in a photo. We tried and gave up. Sometimes all you can do is stand still and let it sink in.

Around that time, something inside us began to shift. It wasn't dramatic. No lightning bolt moment. Just subtle recalibrations. Less urgency. More presence. We weren't trying to control the day anymore, just to be in it. We noticed how we stopped checking our watches. How we stopped needing to fill silences. The world wasn't demanding anything from us, and so we gave it nothing but attention.

> *"Eventually, we reached Alaska. But even then, it didn't feel like a destination. It felt like an extension."*

There were countless highlights, too many to list. But one night will stay with us forever. Weeks before we left, Steve had stumbled on a local Alaskan band called The Blackwater Railroad Company. He added a few tracks to our road playlist, and their music became the soundscape of our trip. Then, as if by fate, we found out they were playing a show in Denali right near the end of our journey. We were close enough to go. So we did.

That day, Denali, the great mountain, was completely clear. Locals told us how rare that was. It stood massive, perfect, motionless. That night, under a midnight sun, we danced outside a pizza barn with strangers who somehow felt like old friends. Music, fresh air, good beer, and no rush to leave. It was joy. Real joy. Simple, unforced, and unrepeatable.

When we returned Oona to GoNorth, she had thousands of kilometres behind her now, and every single one of them felt personal. The guy at the depot asked how the trip had gone. We smiled. How do you explain that you left chasing a break from life and came back with something even better than rest? Something like clarity. Like peace.

Because in the end, it wasn't about Alaska. It wasn't about any one place or even the drive itself. It was about what filled the space between the lines on the map. The breathing room. The absence of pressure. No signal. No schedule. No audience. Just the freedom to move, or not. To sit still beside a lake for three hours, then decide to leave anyway. To remember that nature owes you nothing, and somehow gives you everything.

We didn't come back with souvenirs. We came back with stillness. And we still feel it now. Weeks later, we still wake early. Still go long stretches without checking our phones. Still pause when we step outside to see what the sky is doing. The road north stays with you like that. Not as a memory, but as a reset. You remember what it's like to trust your instinct. To not be rushed. To make decisions based on feel, not forecast. And to understand that the greatest luxury isn't a destination, it's the freedom to be nowhere in particular, and totally at peace with that.

"That night, under a midnight sun, we danced outside a pizza barn with strangers who somehow felt like old friends. Music, fresh air, good beer, and no rush to leave."

Halibut Cove, Alaska

Blackwater Railroad Company

Protesting and driving, Denali National Park

???

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ADVENTURER

GoNorth, the stats...

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Truck campers survive where vans or trailers might fail. These units are strapped down securely, often feature robust suspension, and handle rough roads.

Why It Rocks Over Other RVs
It merges the tough-by-design benefits of full size trucks with the overnight comfort of a camper. Compared to vans or motorhomes, you get far more off grid reach without sacrificing basic comforts.

For more information: **www.gonorth-alaska.com**

THE MILEPOST
Plan-A-Trip Map

Days with Oona, our GoNorth 4x4: 21 days

Distance covered: 6,846km

Average daily drive: 326km each day.

Wildlife sightings: 10 Black Bears, 5 Grizzlies, 7 Moose, 3 Porcupines, 1 Coyote, 1 Red Fox, 1 Elk, numerous Bald Eagles, Puffins, Humpback Whales, Seals and Orcas.

GoNorth offers picks up from Seattle in Washington, Whitehorse in the Yukon, Anchorage and Fairbanks in Alaska.

They also offer one way rentals, we picked up in Seattle and dropped off in Anchorage.

GoNorth offers one-way pre-season deals between all four rental stations. Their website has a host of helpful tips for your trip along with itineraries and day trips deals.

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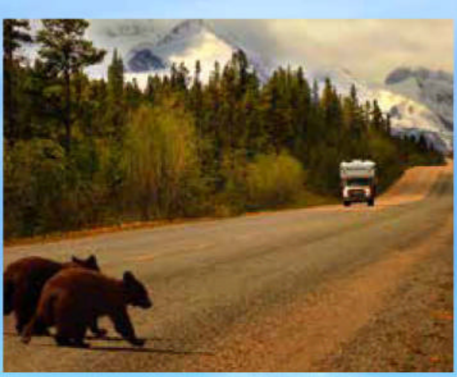
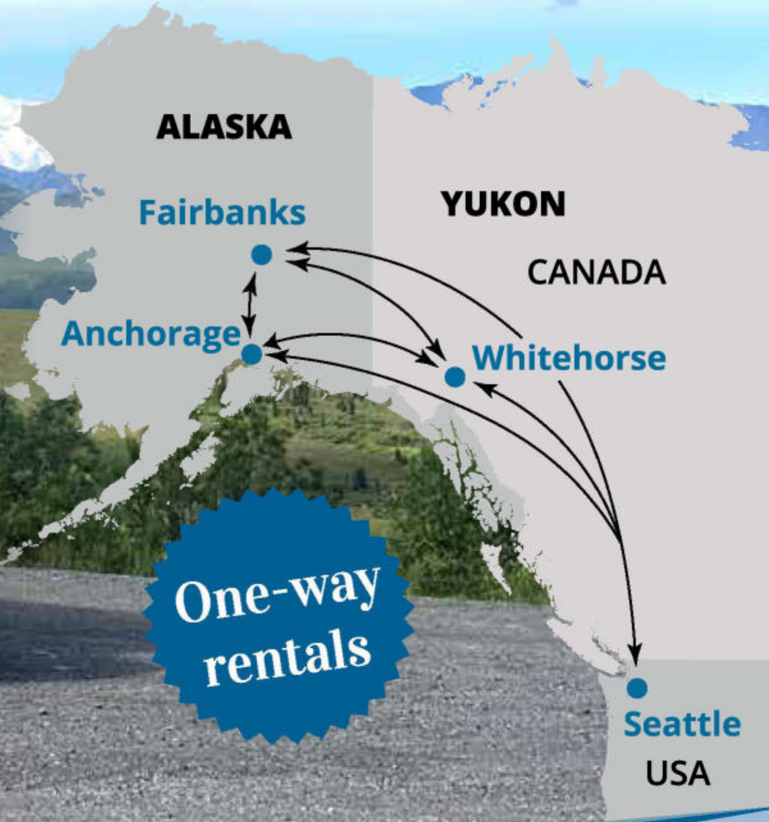

Truck Camper (4WD)

Motorhome

SUV (4WD)

ADVENTURER
GoNorth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WILD CHIX
Isabell Zitzelsberger

Isabell Zitzelsberger once worked full-time in Marketing and Sales for Surtees Boats, where she dealt daily with customers, mostly men, interested in purchasing boats. What struck her was how often the language and behaviour around these transactions reinforced outdated stereotypes.

Buying a boat is a significant financial decision, a major investment and a memory-making opportunity for the whole family, yet it was often referred to as his toy. Men were the ones learning to back the trailer, drive the boat, and navigate the rules of the sea (hopefully), while their wives typically handled the money transfer, packed the lunches, and organized the children.

That didn't sit right with Isabell.

As a boat salesperson, she was regularly underestimated. Customers would often ask, "Is there a salesman, please?" or assume she was the admin lady. It rarely crossed anyone's mind that she might actually be the one with deep knowledge about the boats and responsible for making the sale.

This kind of gender bias wasn't limited to the boating industry. In 2021, Isabell began her journey into hunting. She completed a HUNTS course with the local Bay of Plenty NZDA and later joined the committee as secretary, again, in a predominantly male environment. At their most recent AGM, only four women were present. That number stuck with her.

These recurring patterns of underrepresentation and assumption led Isabell to take action. She founded Wild Chix, an initiative aimed at empowering women in traditionally male-dominated outdoor spaces. One of the first offerings was a Basic Boating Course designed specifically for women, those who didn't want to rely on asking their husbands for help.

Through Wild Chix, Isabell is creating a space where women can gain confidence, knowledge, and independence, on the water and beyond.

We caught up with Isabell for a quick chat…

Isabell and a 83cm Snapper

What first sparked your interest in boating and hunting, traditionally male-dominated fields? Coming from Overseas New Zealand appears like a huge playground. Back in Germany, where I am from, we do not have access to the ocean or the bush as much as here. Without knowing that those were "male dominated" industries, I just did it, loved it and then realised that it was actually more guys doing it. Haha.

What's the most common misconception people have about women in boating and hunting? They just think they are not interested in it. I am not sure if anyone has even asked the question and if women even think about it themselves. It is just a giving thing that this is a man's thing.

How do you think the perception of women in boating and hunting has changed over the past decade if at all? Yes it does, but too slow. I can just comment on the last decade as I came to NZ in 2012. You see more ladies interested but it should be made more accessible to women and that is what we are trying to do with Wild Chix. Just approaching it from a different angle, with taking the "prey drive" out of it and showcasing that those sports can massively help improving mental health, understand nature better, learn to slow down in life etc.

What advice would you give to women who are hesitant to get involved in boating or hunting? Take all your perceptions off! Don't think about "killing animals", guns, blood and guys stuff. Just come in with a mind like a blank canvas and paint your own picture! You will be surprised how different it is!

Are there any specific skills or mindsets that you believe women bring to these sports that are often overlooked? Well, I think we are just different and it is more what the sport can bring to us rather than the other way around. Women are usually way less competitive and are more caring and work better in a team. Hunting and Fishing as such can teach us a lot more skills, create self confidence, create new family activities which the whole family can enjoy, contribute to taking time off, switching off the phone and learn to focus again.

How important is community for women in boating and hunting, and where have you found or built that community? That's what we are trying to do. The NZ Sport Fishing Council and all their Clubs Nationwide are still a mens domain. Same as the Deer Stalker Accossiation. Great Clubs - but heavily driven by men, which can be easily a bit intimidating for women who want to learn. Wild Chix will be the community for ladies, who want to learn, step up, understand nature, build friendships, love being outdoors and improving their skills. Learning new things amongst other ladies is extremely empowering and Wild Chix will do anything to support this.

> *"Wild Chix will be the community for ladies, who want to learn, step up, understand nature, build friendships, love being outdoors and improving their skills. Learning new things amongst other ladies is extremely empowering and Wild Chix will do anything to support this."*

Have you seen any shifts in the industry—such as gear or apparel—that cater more to women? This is a very good question! First of all an apparel, most women clothing seem to be designed by guys, most of them are not fitting well, don't have enough pockets or sometimes it just gets overlooked that also a size 16 or 20 want to be in the outdoors and not just sizes 8 and 10.

What role do you think social media plays in breaking down stereotypes in these sports or making them worse? Social Media wise the issue is often that women who present themselves hunting or fishing target still the guys. It is not about us women, it is more about having a pretty girl in the bush or on a boat. That is attractive for the guys and gives them a good following, but doesn't match with what Wild Chix is about.

We would love to encourage all the ladies out there to come to one of our courses, if it is hunting or fishing, boating (and more to come - stay tuned) just to give it a try and see what it is about. Come with that blank canvas and paint your own picture. No judgment!

What's the most surprising reaction you've received from men when they see you excel in boating or hunting? Usually they are pretty proud of their wives or partners.

Do you have any mentors or role models in these sports, and how have they influenced your journey? Not really, I think all of this shaped over the last few years and then I just held one seminar and it snowballed form there. It was just a typical brain fart of mine, thinking "oh that would be cool" and the rest is history.

Have you encountered pushback or resistance from within the community, and how do you handle it? Not at all! The support from EVERYONE is amazing! Magazines like you pick up on the story, TV already rung up as well as radio stations. The Sport Fishing Council, Coastguard, Maritime and LegaSea are strong supporters, as well as Tackle suppliers, Marine Shops, Expos and Boat Shows. So far there was no resistance - almost like a relief that someone was "finally doing it"

What is next? I was always a go getter and a "oh let's just try this" person. So nothing really I would need to tell my younger self, as I would do it anyway how it comes. I do not do big plans, I just play things by ear, take opportunities as they arise and try to have fun whilst doing it. The ladies will tell me what they need from Wild Chix and we will cater for that as overall it is THEIR community. **www.wildchix.co.nz**

Intro to Hunting - some basics

Intro to Hunting at Kaimanawa Forest Park

Learning important knots

Filleting fish

Navigation & safety in the bush

Boating Basics for women

Proud target shooters

VAN LIFE AND A NEW ROUTE AT FISH WALL

Golden Bay is a special place

Words by Sarah Hay,
'Woman Up' images by Lee Howell

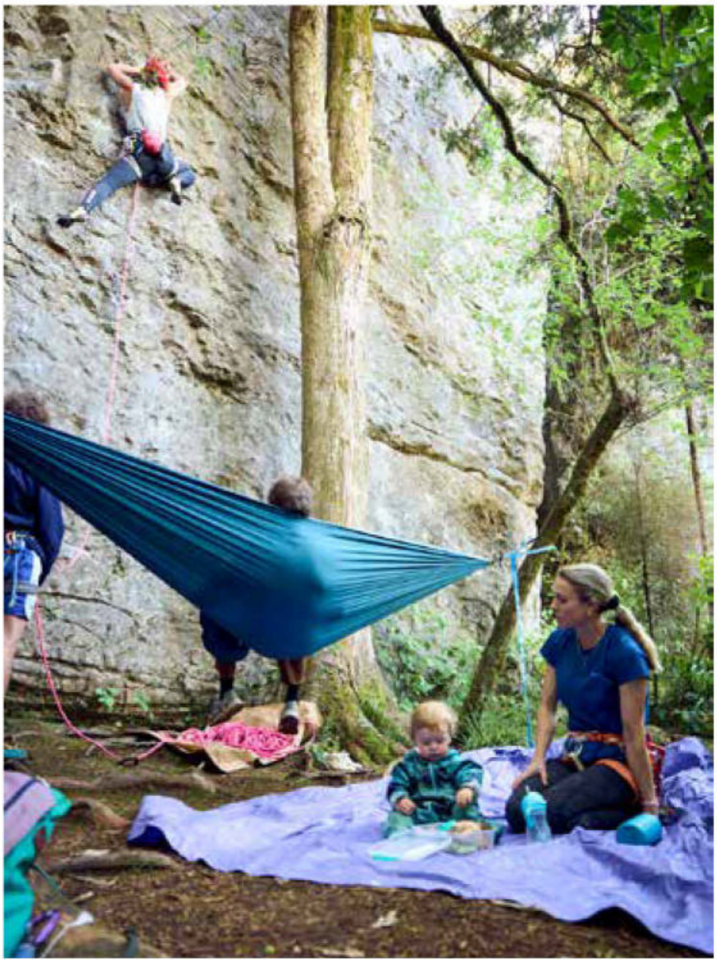
When you drive over Takaka Hill and descent into the bay, it feels like you leave behind the city, work, stress—almost like you've landed on another island entirely. The beaches are stunning, the cafés serve up delicious coffees and breakfasts (make sure you get there early on a rainy day!), and the swimming holes are simply divine after a big day of climbing, hiking, or biking.

And the climbing? You could spend years here and still have projects to work on, and many people do just that. Hangdog is the perfect climber's campground, complete with an outdoor pizza oven, cabins, tent and van sites, shady trees, a strong sense of community, and endless campsite stories to share in the evenings.

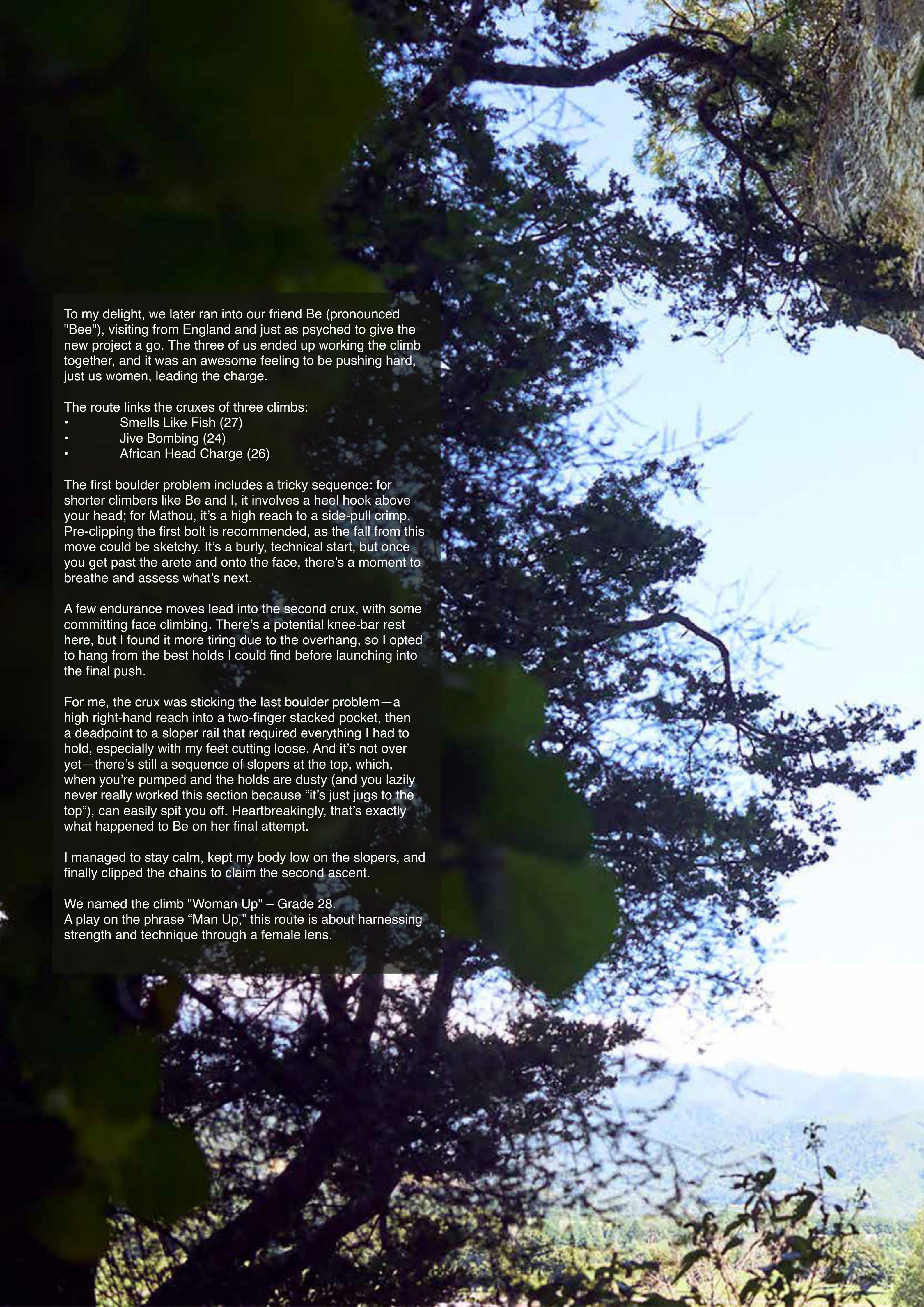
For our family, outdoor climbing has taken a bit of a backseat lately. We're navigating life with two small children aged 1 and 3, while running Northern Rocks full time, and Lee is also launching his new business, Elemental Finishes. So naturally, we thought it would be a great idea to take the general chaos of parenting and squeeze it into a van for a month, four of us sleeping in one vehicle, driving to Golden Bay with a baby who hates being in the car, and attempting to go climbing while entertaining toddlers at the base of a crag. A recipe for disaster, one might think!

After three nights in the van, accepting that everything would be constantly dirty and that it would probably rain 60% of the time (and it did!!) — we started to find our rhythm and embraced van life. We took five days to drive down, stopping at various campsites and playgrounds along the way. When we finally arrived at Hangdog, we met up with some friends and headed out to the crag.

During one session, I met a couple of strong women projecting a route, and we got talking. Mathou Lapayrouse had established a link-up at Fish Wall (Track 6), which she'd been working on for weeks and had just sent to claim the first ascent. She was looking for someone to make the second ascent and help confirm the grade. She invited me to try it, and while I hesitated, wondering if it was out of my league and whether we could juggle it with the kids, I was intrigued.



> *"We thought it would be a great idea to take the general chaos of parenting and squeeze it into a van for a month, four of us sleeping in one vehicle, driving to Golden Bay with a baby who hates being in the car, and attempting to go climbing while entertaining toddlers at the base of a crag."*



To my delight, we later ran into our friend Be (pronounced "Bee"), visiting from England and just as psyched to give the new project a go. The three of us ended up working the climb together, and it was an awesome feeling to be pushing hard, just us women, leading the charge.

The route links the cruxes of three climbs:

- Smells Like Fish (27)
- Jive Bombing (24)
- African Head Charge (26)

The first boulder problem includes a tricky sequence: for shorter climbers like Be and I, it involves a heel hook above your head; for Mathou, it's a high reach to a side-pull crimp. Pre-clipping the first bolt is recommended, as the fall from this move could be sketchy. It's a burly, technical start, but once you get past the arete and onto the face, there's a moment to breathe and assess what's next.

A few endurance moves lead into the second crux, with some committing face climbing. There's a potential knee-bar rest here, but I found it more tiring due to the overhang, so I opted to hang from the best holds I could find before launching into the final push.

For me, the crux was sticking the last boulder problem—a high right-hand reach into a two-finger stacked pocket, then a deadpoint to a sloper rail that required everything I had to hold, especially with my feet cutting loose. And it's not over yet—there's still a sequence of slopers at the top, which, when you're pumped and the holds are dusty (and you lazily never really worked this section because "it's just jugs to the top"), can easily spit you off. Heartbreakingly, that's exactly what happened to Be on her final attempt.

I managed to stay calm, kept my body low on the slopers, and finally clipped the chains to claim the second ascent.

We named the climb "Woman Up" – Grade 28.
A play on the phrase "Man Up," this route is about harnessing strength and technique through a female lens.

AN INTRODUCTORY GUIDE TO BIKEPACKING

For the budget minded gal

Words by Robyn Glendinning and images by Matt Dunwoodie

Bikepacking, cycle touring's grubbier younger sibling. Generally differentiated from cycle touring by its preference for lightweight packing, gravel or mountain bike usage and the option to get off the tarmac.

It's a sport that's grown in popularity in the last 10 years or so, with the advent of bikepacking brevets (races that aren't races but kinda are, with no prizes but definitely still fastest finishers) like the Tour divide and the Arizona trail race as well as the creation of numerous off-road multi-day trails. Endurance sports like bikepacking are a wonderful equalizer, with people of all genders excelling and women often smashing times and holding world records (Lael Wilcox, Jenny Graham, Alexandera Houchin, Jenny Tough and Lee Craigie, to name a few.) When I started bikepacking 6 years ago, I'd never camped outside by myself, never ridden a bike more than 20 km and was a serial overpacker. Self-doubt plagued me and fear followed my back wheel. I was a gal on a budget but with a burning need to ride my bike off into the hills. These are the things I wish someone had told back in those early days rather than having to learn them the hard way.

1: The bike
Put down that credit card. You do not need a brand new, top of the range gravel bike to go bikepacking for the first time. Go dust off that old hardtail or hybrid commuter bike. I have one bike, my trusty multi-purpose secondhand Specialized Rockhopper hardtail that I use for bikepacking, day rides and just popping to the shops. I'm not going to be winning road races on it but that's not what I do. Now there are a bunch of other things to take into account when choosing a bike but the main ones for me, personally, are price, durability (steel or aluminium over carbon) and how it feels and fits. Just because your bike doesn't look like the trendy bikepacking bike of the moment doesn't mean it isn't good or right for you. For your first trip you want something you feel comfy and confident on. So if you've only ever done mountain biking and really like your hardtail or full suspension bike use it, if you've got a commuter style bike with big enough clearance for gravel tyres try it. Yes, you will be technically less efficient on a hardtail versus a gravel bike but you can lock off your suspension and I like to view it as extra resistance training that's going to make my legs super strong long term. I also just like the cushioning that suspension provides.

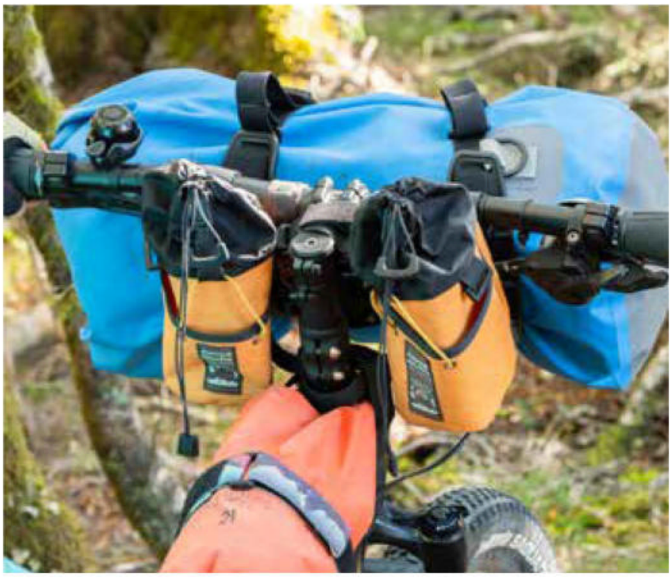
2: The set-up
Bike acquired, it's time to load it with your stuff. The amount of stuff is up to you. It's totally fine to not camp on a multi-day bikepacking trip if you don't want to. I've had lovely adventures in the winter using pre-booked cabins. A lightweight backpacking tent or bivvy (as long as it comes with poles) crosses over to bikepacking quite nicely. Overnight accommodation method chosen, now it's time to decide how stinky you'd like to be. Packing light comes with practice and small sacrifices. I usually have one luxury item on a trip, for example a bikini so I can enjoy hot springs and spas along the way (helps with the smell too). Now depending on your bike, attachment points for luggage might be myriad or none at all. Fear not there are ways and means of securing your gear to your bike. I have a bike that offers no clearance for a seat post bag, has a weird shaped frame and no bolt attachment points. Over the years I have invested in a custom frame bag, feed bags and Aeroe spider racks. But essentially a couple of dry bags, some tensionable straps and maybe a pannier rack for a back bundle and you are good to go (a word of warning on pannier racks, these do have a tendency to shear off on rough terrain and traditional pannier bags are often oversized and don't have strong enough attachment points, so more robust designs are better). Just like packing a backpack it's important to distribute weight well across the bike and to keep snacks, sunscreen, cash and water easily accessible. Your first set up will not be the one you'll have in 5 years and it's ok to slowly build what will work for you. The best investments I've made for my bikepacking kit over the years have been a lightweight down sleeping bag, a frame bag and accepting that a bum bag is actually a really helpful and handy thing, even if it does make me look kinda dodgy when paired with my wrap around sunglasses.

3: Looking after you and your bike
I'm not a bike mechanic. Nor do I want to be. I am quite happy to pay somebody to service my bike for me. But I can with the help of Youtube, change a flat tire, lube a chain and generally look after my bike on the go. Fixes don't have to be perfect out on the road, they just need to get you where you need to go. So doing a bit of practice beforehand can save tears later. Now the thing powering the bike is you. You are the engine. You need fuel, care and rest. I know this might sound like very obvious advice but eating enough on a multi-day trip is a marathon in itself. You'll soon discover how much you really like certain food and what your body really wants to eat. For me, it's steak and chips, sour lollies, baby food (fruit puree is way easier to carry than pieces of fruit) and trail bars that aren't too hard to chew. Having taken friends out on their first overnighter, the next big thing to be mindful of is your butt. It will be sore if you don't ride much but it shouldn't be sore all the time. It needs proper care and protection. Personally I go for the chamois cream, padded shorts and controversially underwear combo (whisper thin no VPL undies I must specify). Take the time to measure the width of your butt (sit your tush on some tin foil or other indentable material and measure the distance between the indent marks of your sit bones) and make sure your seat is at the right height and angled correctly for your anatomy. Everybody's bodies are different and it's all finding out what works for you.

The right bikepacking set up takes practice and trial and error.

Knowing someone with a van is a nice bonus when it comes to bikepacking trips, as though possible to transport a bike in my Honda Fit it does require a bit of disassembly.

4: Getting out there
Bike packed, ready to go and the big scaries hit. What if i'm lonely, what if there are scary moments, what if I can't do this. Okay deep breath. Bring it back. Why are you going bikepacking? To have fun (I hope) and whether you are going alone or with friends there will be challenges and risks. But we can mitigate them. Leave intentions and share your route, use a live tracking function on an app of your choosing (I use Komoot), hire or buy a PLB or dot tracker. Have a first aid and repair kit you know how to use. Take your high-vis vest and get good lights (front and back). Choose trails that slowly build your confidence level, the Ngā Haerenga New Zealand cycle trail's 23 great rides are a good place to start and can be built upon with resources like the Heartland rides, trails put together by the Kennett Brothers and Great Kiwi Gravel. Go for a one-nighter from your front door and see how everything feels. To combat loneliness I like to keep a journal as a way of checking in with myself whilst riding. Because it's a pleasure and a privilege to get to explore the world around us by bike. There is no prize for riding the fastest, or smoking it up hills without stopping. Listen to your body. If you need a rest day, take a rest day. You decide what's right for you on your trip.



A budget $20 heavy duty dry bag working alongside New Zealand made Yonder Treatbags from Paper Roads Aotearoa. One of my more recent additions

Out enjoying some gravel on the Canaan road on top of Takaka hill

5: Have fun
The most important step. Have fun. Whether it's type 1, 2, 3 or 4 (Hopefully mostly type 1 and 2). Enjoy yourself. Look after yourself and others you ride with. Be kind and respectful to other trail users and the environment you are riding through. Don't be afraid to ask for help and take things at your own pace. The only thing I ever regret on trips is not stopping often enough and not taking my time. So on you go, go enjoy some sunshine and may all your windy days be tailwinds, your downhills be smooth and your snacks be abundant.

Robyn is an illustrator, designer and content creator based in Tasman. You can follow her adventures and creative work on instagram @robyn_glendinning

GEMMA WAGSTAFF

Creating a community

Meet Gemma Wagstaff, the 29-year-old Wellington-based designer who's revolutionizing the wetsuit industry one beautiful, functional piece at a time. Growing up as a "total water baby" competing in swimming, surf lifesaving, and synchronised swimming, Gemma always struggled to find swimwear that combined performance with style. This frustration led her to study design, where she questioned why wetsuits were always "black, ill-fitting, and uninspiring, especially for women."

Her graduate wetsuit collection not only won an International Emerging Designer Award but also secured national TV coverage and a spot at New Zealand Fashion Week. Today, Gemma Lee Wetsuits creates ethically manufactured pieces in small runs, featuring digitally printed designs that bring colour and personality to the lineup. Based in Wellington, the perfect testing ground for cold-water gear, Gemma is building more than a brand; she's creating a community for like-minded ocean women in a traditionally male-dominated space.

What inspired you to bring colour and pattern to this traditionally functional garment? I've been swimwear-obsessed for as long as I can remember—growing up training twice a day, I practically lived in togs. I would spend hours online, even at 12 years old, searching for the prettiest swimsuits. But then I'd have to cover them up with the same old boring black wetsuit. It felt like my personality disappeared.

It wasn't until uni that I realised this was a gap in the market. Through my research, I discovered you could digitally print onto neoprene, and I thought—why not bring fun, colour, and individuality into this space? There was no reason wetsuits couldn't be just as expressive as the swimwear underneath.

You've mentioned that surfing has long been a male-dominated space. How do you see your brand contributing to changing that dynamic? Gemma Lee was built with the goal of helping women feel confident in the water. Our brand creates an inclusive space by combining bold design with community connection—making women feel seen, supported, and celebrated. The more women we see out there, the more empowered others feel to join in too. It's about shifting the narrative and creating space, one wave at a time.

Ethics are clearly important to you. Can you tell us about your journey to finding ethical manufacturing and why it matters so much to your brand? This was one of the biggest challenges—especially as a 22-year-old fresh out of uni with no industry contacts and a limited budget. I couldn't exactly jump on a plane to visit factories myself, so I started close to home, working with a small Australian manufacturer I was lucky to visit often. But as we grew, their capacity couldn't keep up.

I explored producing in New Zealand, but none of the local wetsuit facilities could offer the specialised digital printing I required. That's when I connected with the team at WRAP (Worldwide Responsible Accredited Production), who sent out a factory request on my behalf. It eventually led me to my current manufacturing partner.

Our overseas wetsuit and swimwear factories are WRAP certified—meaning they've passed strict audits and ongoing surprise inspections to ensure ethical, safe, and socially responsible practices are always being upheld. Knowing our pieces are made fairly and consciously will always be non-negotiable.

You had an incredible early success with TV coverage and Vogue Italia featuring your work. How did that sudden spotlight affect your approach to business? It gave me a huge confidence boost. That early recognition helped me back myself more and put my work out there. I started taking bolder opportunities—like messaging the Mayor of Wellington on Facebook to ask for a meeting because I'd heard he used to run his own business. That kind of momentum made me less afraid to take risks and really shaped how I approach growth.

Your 2021 concussion significantly impacted both your surfing and business. How did this experience change your perspective on risk and resilience as an entrepreneur? The concussion forced me to slow down, not just physically, but mentally. I had to surrender to the pace of recovery—something that didn't come naturally to me. It taught me resilience in a whole new way. I learned that rest is not weakness and that rebuilding slowly doesn't mean failure. In fact, it's where the most thoughtful growth happens. It's also where I reconnected with the "why" behind what I do.

You mentioned the challenge of creating wetsuits that fit "like a second skin" across different body shapes. What's your design philosophy when it comes to fit and functionality for women? My goal has always been to design wetsuits that honour the female form. I use thoughtful panelling to follow natural curves and create a flattering silhouette that also performs. Comfort, function, and feel-good factor all matter—because when a woman feels great in her gear, she shows up in the water with confidence.

You recently launched your first chest-zip steamer in the Wildflower collection. What drove this technical innovation, and how does it improve the surfing experience? There was a strong demand from my community for a chest-zip option. While they can be trickier to get on, chest zips offer superior performance. They're more watertight, with a layered barrier under the zip that traps any water leaks

and drains them out. Plus, without a rigid zip running down the back, there's more flexibility for paddling and surfing. Once people experience the performance of a chest zip, they rarely go back.

You've described that magical moment of seeing a stranger wearing your wetsuit in remote Australia. How important is building community among your customers? It means everything. Community is the heart of Gemma Lee. It's what fuels me to keep building something beautiful and intentional. There's nothing better than bringing like-minded women together, supporting each other, and celebrating the shared love for the ocean.

As a small business owner, you wear many hats. What skills have you had to develop that you never expected when you started as a designer? This question made me laugh—because honestly, the answer is everything! I had the design part down, but suddenly I had to learn marketing, social media, Meta ads, budgeting, cash flow, forecasting… the list is endless. Being a small business owner forces you to become a quick learner and a master of adaptability.

Your brand creates pieces in small runs, making each wetsuit somewhat exclusive. How does this limited production model align with your business values? I love our small-run model. It's sustainable—we rarely have excess—and it keeps our collections special. Our customers know they're getting something unique, and that aligns perfectly with our mission of helping women feel empowered, seen, and one of a kind.

You've mentioned that 2025 will be "your year." What exciting developments can we expect from Gemma Lee Wetsuits? Absolutely! The last few years have been slower while I focused on recovery, but 2025 is full steam ahead. We've got four new collections lined up and some really exciting collaborations on the horizon. I feel more energised and inspired than ever before.

Your customer base is split 50/50 between New Zealand and Australia. What does this tell you about the appetite for design-forward wetsuits in the Southern Hemisphere? It shows that women here are craving more than just performance—they want surfwear that reflects their personality, joy, and individuality. There's a growing appetite for pieces that not only function well in the water but also look and feel amazing.

Social media has played a big role in that shift. It's created space for individual self-expression. It's exciting to see women embracing colour, design, and uniqueness in the lineup.

For young women who might be intimidated by male-dominated surf lineups, what advice would you give them about finding their place in the water? Know that you belong. Take up space. The ocean is for everyone. It's totally normal to feel nervous at first, but confidence builds over time—the more you show up, the more natural it will feel. Most areas have amazing women's surf groups, and joining one can make a huge difference. Being out there with like-minded women not only builds your confidence but creates a sense of community and support that helps you hold your ground in the lineup. You don't have to do it alone.

For young women entering the competitive outdoor business world what advice would you give? You miss 100% of the shots you don't take. Don't get discouraged when it feels hard—that's just part of the journey. The sooner you accept that challenges are normal, the less time you'll spend doubting yourself and the more time you can spend building your confidence and momentum.

What advice would Gemma Lee today give to Gemma Lee five years ago? So much! But probably this: It's okay not to have it all figured out. Don't panic when things go wrong—that's part of it. You'll figure it out. Trust your gut, keep showing up, and don't waste energy on self-doubt. You're doing better than you think.

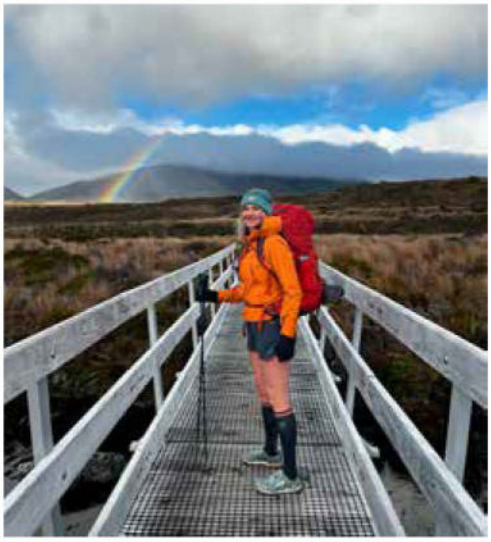
Lastly, anyone you would like to thank who has helped you on your journey? Honestly, my husband. After my concussion, I really struggled to get my confidence back. I questioned whether I could rebuild the momentum I once had—but he never doubted me, not even for a moment. His belief in me has been unshakable, and I'm so grateful for that constant support.

MEET EMILY RUSSELL

Adventure Enthusiast and MD Outdoors Owner

Emily Russell embodies the spirit of New Zealand's outdoor adventure culture. Growing up between the rugged West Coast of the South Island and the stunning Coromandel Peninsula, Emily's love for exploration was shaped by some of the country's most spectacular natural landscapes. Now based in Nelson—what she considers "the best place to live in the world"—Emily has found her perfect adventure basecamp, surrounded by three national parks and endless opportunities for outdoor pursuits.

As someone who believes that "adventure coexists with living outside of my comfort zone," Emily has channeled her passion for the outdoors into MD Outdoors, an all-female team dedicated to empowering others with quality gear and expert advice. Her philosophy is simple: life shouldn't be wasted, and every day presents an opportunity for adventure if you choose to embrace it. Through MD Outdoors, Emily combines her love for nature with her commitment to community, sustainability, and helping others discover the transformative power of outdoor experiences.



Heaphy Track, Photo by Jesse Weenink

Where did you grow up? In the South Island mainly, on the West Coast but also spent a lot of time in the Coromandel and in the best country in the world NZ. Location now Nelson, NZ. Best place to live in the world to me.

What do you love most about the location where you are now? Nelson is amazing! It is adventure central, it has so much to explore and is close to 3 National parks. The options are endless. You can also get to so many other adventure gateways in a few hours. The population size means there are not huge traffic issues and you still get the vibe of a smaller community which I love.

Where did your obvious love of adventure come from? I grew up in the country most of my life and around stunning beaches, rivers and I have always had an adventurous spirit that loves to explore everything I can. I find nature so magical in how it changes seasonally, the beauty and power you feel being on a mountain top and being somewhere where hardly anyone else is seems so special to me. I guess adventure coexists with living outside of my comfort zone which to me makes me feel the most like truly being alive. Nature recharges my energy especially being out alone or with my partner Jesse. I am a big lover of finding the natural highs in life so being on adventures gives us this in such a beautiful way. Everyday can be an adventure in some way; you just have to choose it.

How would someone describe you who knows you well? I am not a person who can sit still for long.. I love meeting new people, finding the right energy to be around and bringing the right energy into the world is really important to me. I believe so much that life should not be wasted so I like to live life with passion and as much adventure as possible.I always follow my dreams even when they are really hard and there is risk involved... because the hard & risky adventures in life always bring the most reward..but this does mean sometimes my life can be really scary lol. Family is very very important to me and I like to make sure a lot of my time is spent investing in this. I love learning to love all the little things everyday that can bring us joy and being present wherever my feet may be. If I can do something I always want to do my best or not bother... and mostly I just try to have as much fun as I can along the way :)

Describe MD Outdoors We like to provide the best gear, advice and service to our customers. Our team here are passionate about the outdoors in our many different pursuits.We are all girls! Which has kinda just ended up that way, but we love and embrace empowering everyone who comes into the store to be prepared with the right gear and get out there and smash it with whatever adventures and plans they have.

Our community of outdoor enthusiasts is really important to us and we love hosting different events each month that help educate and connect people.

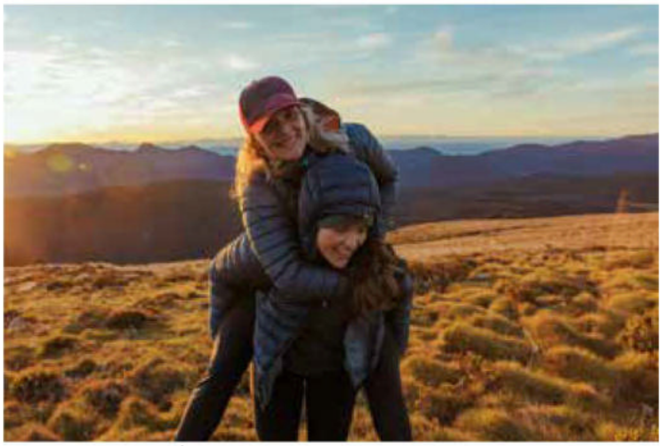
Our website is updated weekly with blogs about different hiking locations, places to camp that we personally or our customers have explored and we love promoting the incredible region we live in.

We like to support companies with good reputations environmentally and that provide good support and warranties with their gear. We see the best way to help our planet is to buy less and buy products that can be repaired.

We test out as much as possible ourselves personally to make sure we can sell it with confidence that it will withstand the elements and provide our customers with a great experience.
www.mdoutdoors.co.nz

epic coffee

MD Outdoors Shop picture Amiee Jules Photography



Emma Shuttle and Emily Russell, Kahurangi National Park

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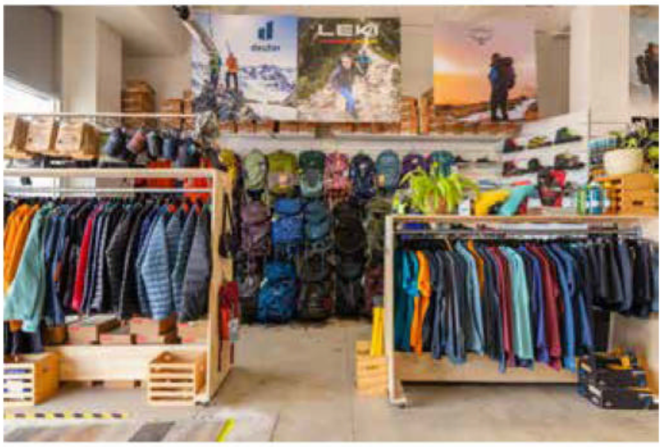
MD Outdoors Shop front

The Team - Jo Taylor, Emma Shuttle and Emily Russell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MD Outdoors Shop picture Amiee Jules Photography

ULTRAMARATHONS

HOW TO...

By Nick Laurie

The definition of an ultramarathon is a run over the length of a Marathon, 42.2 kilometres. There are varying types, you can do laps of a track over 6, 12 or 24 hours, 6.7 kilometre laps of a yard, known as a backyard ultra, or laps of a course for hours at a time, or a point to point race usually over 50, 75, 100 kilometres or one hundred miles. All of these are seemingly stupid endeavours that attract mentally challenged individuals who must be running from something, need achievements in their lives, or have a David Goggins like mentality where they just love hurting. There's a mountain, I reckon that I could run over that.

Step one: Enter
So, you are nuts and want to tackle a trail Ultra? Where do you start? I decided that I could give this a go and entered the iconic New Zealand trail race, The Kepler challenge. This is a 60k alpine run and would require some serious training. Entering was a feat in itself with entries going on sale at 6:30 am on the first Saturday in July. They sold out within 2 minutes and there is now a waitlist 450 deep.

The main Ultras in NZ are:
The Tarawera- 21k, 50k, 100k and 100miles
Taupo Ultra 21k, 50k 70k and 100k
The Kepler Challenge-60k
The Tekapo Ultra 21k, 31k and 50k
Mototapu Ultra 21k, 42.2k and 50k
Old Ghost Road Ultra 85k
The Blue Lake 24h Challenge
The Great Naseby Water race 50k, 80k, 100k, 100 miles, 200k, and 200miles
Th Faultline Ultra 25k 53k 100k and 100miles

> *"All of these are seemingly stupid endeavours that attract mentally challenged individuals who must be running from something, need achievements in their lives, or have a David Goggins like mentality where they just love hurting. There's a mountain, I reckon that I could run over that. "*

Step 2: Get the gear
In order to run an Ultra you will make it far easier on yourself if you train with the gear that you will race in. You will need a pair of trail shoes, some great socks, a pair of shorts with pockets, a moisture wicking shirt, a hydration vest and a headlamp for longer races. Compulsory emergency gear will include a seam sealed raincoat, and an emergency blanket or bag, For fuel, you will need gels, electrolytes and pickle juice.

Shoes are a big one. Go with a trusted brand. The most popular trail shoe is the Hoka speedgoat. Salomon are the next most popular, followed by Asics. The Asics trabucco model is quite a good one. One of the most durable brands is Merrell with the Agility Peak 5 being a comfortable model. Adidas are introducing a trail brand called Terrex and I have run in a pair that were pliable and seemed to promote a light footed sensation but they came in white which is now mud brown.

Blisters are a thing that can derail a race. These are negated by good socks. Don't wear cotton. A few Ultra heroes like Sam Harvey and Harvey Lewis use the Creepers toe sox. I'm going to test these out. I have run in Thorlo socks which are good but have holes in them after only 2000 kilometres! The right sock will make your day.

A hydration vest rather that a hydration bladder has been more effective for me. The bladders get annoying after 5 hours and the vests ride high so don't hurt your back as much. They are easier to refill and save a bit of time at aid stations.

Fuelling strategy and management is also important. A crook guts, or cramp are not something that you want to endure while your legs are crying out to stop the madness. As you run longer diatances you will tend to need to eat real food rather than lollies and gels. My ideal has been salty boiled potatoes and Raspberries. Alas not many aid stations have these so I have had to make do. I don't handle caffeine or electrolytes too well and it is a balancing act for me which is fine tuned after every training and race/lesson.

Step 3: Get Running
You are going to need to get some kilometres under your belt in order to tackle an ultra. The first thing to do is make one of your weekly runs a longer one in the bush or on a trail. I gradually increased my runs up to where I peaked at a 10 hour run. You don't have to worry about pace until you have time on your feet mastered. The road Marathon training of looking at your pace all the time does not weigh in here. You need to perfect the Ultra Shuffle. Once you can go long then you can add in some tempo sessions so that you can travel along at a nice clip and remain comfortable. You can keep adding until you are up to a long run Saturday and then another the next day. Good bye family time. Getting to this point will literally take years of gradual improvement. Lots of ultra marathoners get the help of a coach who can map out a schedule that will see you achieve your goals.

During these runs you will find out if your gear is up to scratch. You'll discover if you are fuelling correctly and also gain some dexterity required to run over rocks, through mud and water and how to best tackle hills.

Step 4 The Race
For my first Ultra race I had a coaching call with a coach to allay my fears and doubts and to come up with a racing strategy. I basically ignored all of the advice and went too hard for the first 25k and then the wheels fell off. His advice was start slow and then if you feel great in the latter stages then speed up. Here's a tip: you wont feel better in the latter stages so start slow and finish slower. Ultra etiquette is to walk the steep hills to conserve energy. Your training will dictate what steep looks like. Molehills become mountains after you have been running all day. After a couple of years doing this now, I am finding that I bury my time goals and go for the experience. This means that when I do have a great day, I finish happy and content rather than getting pissed off out on the course because I'm not running to a schedule. I have learnt here that comparison is the thief of joy. If I want to have a fast day on the trails, I need to have trained for that and run within my ability. This beats looking at splits and crying at each failure. The race is a culmination of all the training, a good taper and a perfectly executed strategy.

So there you go. Go do an Ultra

"You will need a pair of trail shoes, some great socks, a pair of shorts with pockets, a moisture wicking shirt, a hydration vest and a headlamp for longer races."

"Here's a tip: you wont feel better in the latter stages so start slow and finish slower."

NOT STRONG FOR A GIRL

Just strong

Words by Sarah Hay

When it comes to women in climbing, it's hard to know where to start. We could highlight the incredible achievements of female climbers both globally and here in Aotearoa. There's Janja Garnbret, who's become a household name thanks to her dominance on the world stage. In New Zealand, Rebecca Hounsell is pushing the limits with more grade 28 and 29 ascents than any other woman in the country – and her first grade 30 is clearly on the horizon. Erica Gatland made history as the first Kiwi woman to climb V10, V11 & V12 outdoors, and has stood on countless NIBS podiums and national events as Champion. Rachel Maia continues to inspire as a para-climber, recently securing 3rd at an IFSC World Cup, adding to her historic 3rd place World Cup medal for New Zealand. Cirrus Tan is one of the strongest competition climbers in New Zealand and is a professional coach. And Sarah Tetzlaff became the first Kiwi woman to represent Aotearoa in Olympic speed climbing – breaking new ground for the sport.

But climbing in New Zealand is so much more than elite athletes. The real movement is happening at the grassroots – in climbing gyms, outdoor crags, and local comps – led by passionate women and girls who are redefining the landscape. These are the people helping more wāhine step through the doors, feel welcome in gyms, and discover their strength on the wall.

To build champions, we need to start at the beginning. That means creating spaces where girls feel like they truly belong – where gyms aren't dominated by shirtless bros yelling beta, but by communities that encourage, empower, and support. The growth of climbing gyms across Aotearoa has been a huge driver in increasing female participation, especially with the rise of women-led classes and programs. Having women in key roles – as coaches, setters, managers – makes a real difference. At Northern Rocks, both myself and Carmen are in management roles. Across the country, we have trailblazers like Carole Lim and Christina Rivett route setting at Uprising in Christchurch, and Grace Hansen and Lena Ray setting and coaching at Northern Rocks.

But we can't talk about progress without acknowledging the gaps that still exist. From media representation to route setting, climbing is still far from equal. Lena Ray – a climber, coach, setter and data analyst – recently crunched the numbers on the top 25 climbing podcasts from 2011 to 2024. The results are sobering: on average, fewer than 30% of guests were women. Over half of all episodes featured no women at all. For male-hosted podcasts, only 25% of guests were female, and only 28% of episodes included a woman at all. The podcasts with the highest representation of women? All hosted by women.

It's a similar story in high-level route setting. At IFSC World Cups and Championships from 2020–2025, 96% of Head Setter roles went to men. In total, 91% of all setting roles were filled by men. This is despite the fact that around 20% of IFSC-qualified setters are women. On average, female setters are hired 40% less often than you'd expect. 72% of competitions had no female setters involved at any level.

Some specifics:

- No women currently hold Level 4 route setting qualifications.
- Level 1 is the only category where women were hired more often than expected.
- Levels 3 and 4 are the most commonly hired levels – and men dominate those roles.
- The average male setter at Level 3 or 4 was hired 1.5 times; female setters at that level were hired just 1.1 times.
- Overall, male setters are hired 60% more frequently than their female counterparts.

These stats are slowly improving year by year – but we still have a long way to go. In New Zealand, no CNZ national competition has ever had a female Head Setter working alone. As far as I'm aware, I'm also the only woman who owns a climbing gym in the country. There are still significantly fewer female gym managers than male ones.

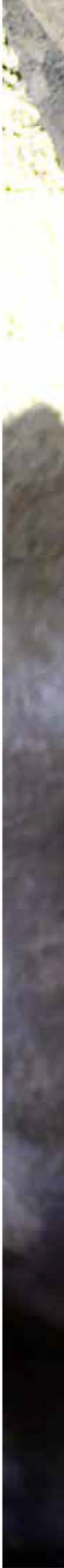
And yet, when we ask young girls in our programs who inspires them – it's the women. It's seeing other wāhine leading, setting, climbing, coaching. That visibility matters.

At Northern Rocks, we've worked hard to create a culture of inclusivity. We also saw a gap in participation over high school age girls in climbing. We saw the need for change and responded by launching She Climbs – a girls-only bouldering program, supported by Harbour Sport and Sport NZ. It bridges a gap we identified in female high school participation and has introduced over 400 girls to bouldering so far. Some of them are now competing, others are working in the gym and mentoring new climbers.

More girls and women are climbing than ever before – and it's exciting. Bouldering gyms are social, fun spaces to hang out and challenge yourself. Climbing isn't just about brute strength – it's about technique, creative problem-solving, footwork, flexibility, and mental grit.

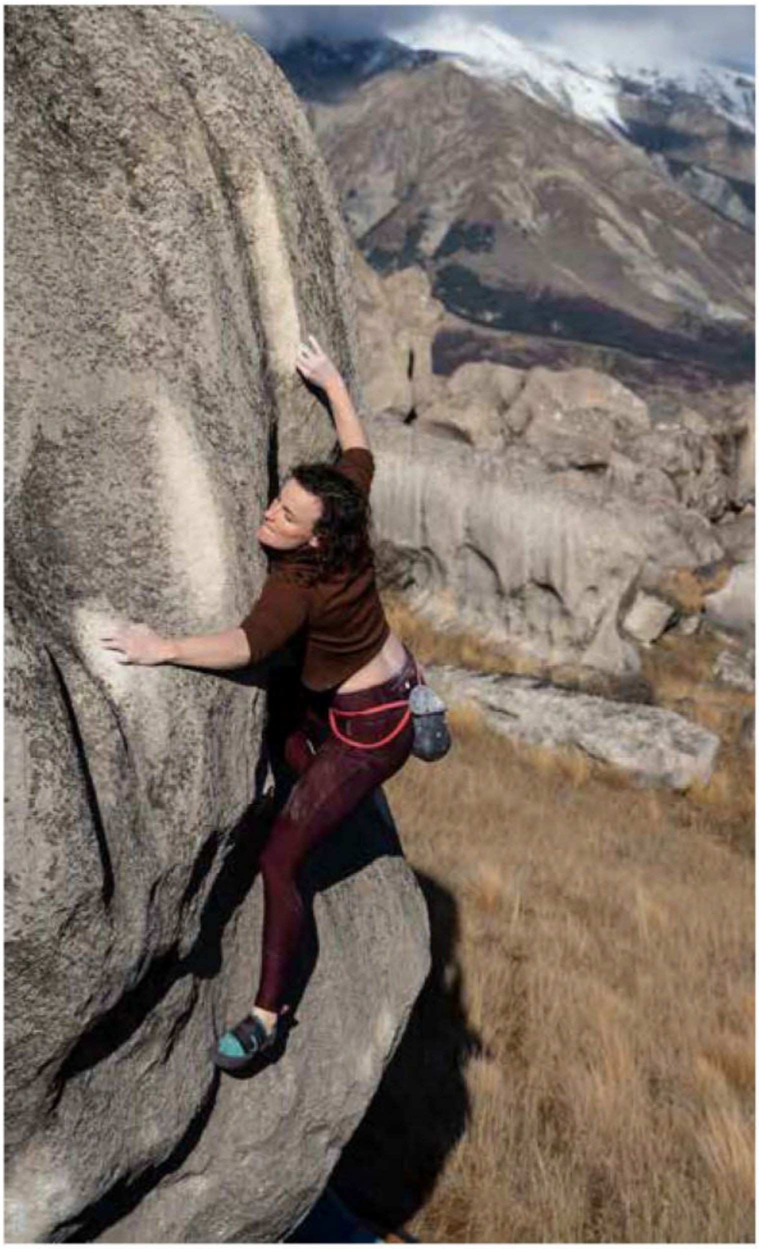
Women are strong climbers that play integral roles in the community. We train hard. We send V12, set for National events, manage commercial facilities and compete at the Olympics.

"We're not strong for a girl, we're just strong"



Ladies Day at the Teapot (Photo by Christina Rivett)

Meet Erica Gatland



Alberto Balsam V8 Flock Hill (photo by Derek Thatcher)

Can you tell us in one paragraph about yourself? I've been climbing for 17 years, starting out in Auckland when I was 10. Since then, I've competed in bouldering and lead climbing at both national and international levels. I'm passionate about all forms of climbing—bouldering, sport, and trad—and have travelled the world for both comps and outdoor climbing. I studied veterinary science for 5 years in Palmerston North, and for the past 2.5 years have been working as a vet in Christchurch, climbing frequently at Castle Hill. I'm currently on the road around the UK and Europe, combining locum work with as much climbing as possible.

You have established many female firsts in New Zealand, can you name them for us? I was the first female in New Zealand to boulder V10, V11, and V12. My first V10 was Mr Biggleswoth Low in Squamish, BC, Canada. Since then, I've climbed a number of problems graded V10 and above, with some of my most notable sends including Demolition Man (V11), Moby Dick (V12), and Full Monk (V12), all located in the Castle Hill Basin.

Can you tell us about the process behind your recent achievement of Full Monk V12 ? The process involved walking past the boulder for a number of years staring at and thinking it looked incredible but was too hard and too burly for me. Then one cold autumn day I was out at Quantum field climbing on my own and decided to abseil down it, have a look and feel the holds. I surprised myself by doing almost all of the moves in that first session and knew right away that it would be possible! Then over the next two weeks, I was constantly thinking about it, and returned 3 more times until I sent it! I was very happy with this achievement. It was nice to send such a cool boulder before leaving the hill for Europe for the next 2 years.

Tell us about the Basin Babes and how that could help other women get into outdoor bouldering? Basin Babes is a group dedicated to women climbing at Castle Hill Basin and was created by myself and a couple close friends. We host regular climbing days at different boulder fields to help introduce more ladies into outdoor bouldering, show them the area and encourage them to challenge themselves. We also manage a Facebook group where people can organise to go climbing amongst themselves, find rides or partners to climb with. The events are very casual; we just go climbing together and connect with such an incredible place and people.

What does climbing / training look like for you on a weekly basis, and how do you balance work as a Vet with climbing hard? I am very lucky with my job. For the last few years I have worked 4 day weeks and had two amazing bosses that were very supportive of my passion. I was able to go climbing outdoors regularly with many mid-week missions to the hill! Now I am locuming in the UK and get to go climbing all over Europe! As for my training, it would be best described as unstructured yet consistent! I juggle days climbing at the local gym, my home woody, local crags and castle hill. Sometimes I will get psyched and do extra conditioning and strength training, other times I will just forerun for the route setters.

What is your process for climbing hard outdoors? The process changes depending on the climb. Often it starts by scouting and trying to find the right project that fits my body and my strengths. Then it usually involves a bit of game. This includes cleaning the boulder, top roping, working the moves, brushing the holds lots and resting appropriately. Power spots and friends to project with are always very helpful. Conditions are very important especially when trying at your limit. Then, the hardest part is trying really fucking hard! And then maybe even harder is trying to be patient and wait for the process to play out and do its thing.

What are your next outdoor goals and where can we expect to see you climbing next? My next goal would be to level up! I am keen to try lots of different styles of climbing while travelling. I would like to improve my trad climbing and play around on boulders far above my pay grade.

> *"Basin Babes is a group dedicated to women climbing at Castle Hill Basin and was created by myself and a couple close friends. We host regular climbing days at different boulder fields to help introduce more ladies into outdoor bouldering, show them the area and encourage them to challenge themselves."*

Grace in action in the Boulder Bash Finals, Northern Rocks. Photo by Lee Howell

Meet Grace Hansen

How/when did you get into climbing? at what age? Since I was little I was always up a tree or a lamp post or on a roof and when I was almost 11 my parents heard about this bouldering gym called Northern Rocks, that was about to open and so they signed me up for classes and I loved it and so I kept going back.

How did you transition from a climber, to a coach and then to a route setter? What is it about setting that you enjoy? I transitioned from a climber to a coach when I started to feel confident enough in my own climbing abilities that I wanted to share climbing with others. I ran a little program by myself for a few kids outside of Northern Rocks and then eventually I got asked if I wanted to coach at Northen Rocks. After coaching for a while I got asked one day if I wanted to test some of the climbs that had been set. On that same day I also got to set my own climb which then led to me being asked back to officially set which I was stoked about. After a while I became part of the setting team. I enjoyed setting because it allows me to be creative, problem solve and think more outside the box, I love how everything comes together nicely at the end and how good it feels to finish with everyone happy. My favourite part would have to be testing the climbs we've put up and trying new things whether they work or not.

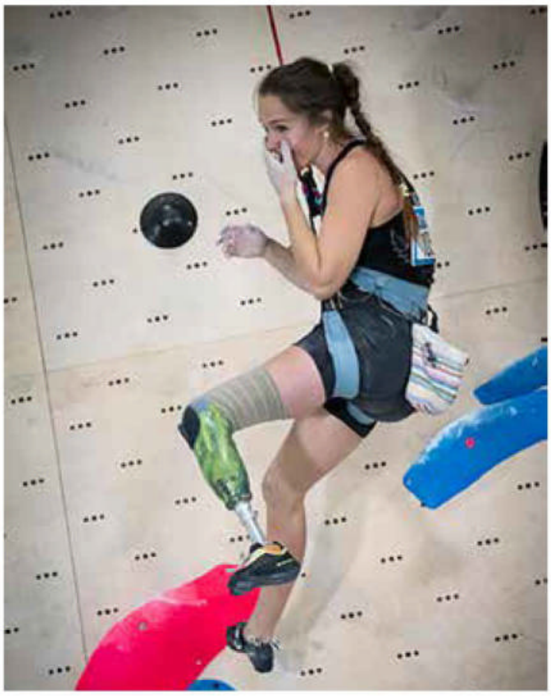
How do you balance climbing training, coaching and route setting, along with your school work? I have found it quite hard to balance everything over the years and quite a few times I have found myself falling behind on something, whether it school work or training or my social life. I have found that it comes down to a few things, but the main thing is having a really good schedule in place.

What do you love about climbing and why? I love climbing because of the joy it brings me. I love how it motivates me to push myself and I love the never ending challenge. With climbing you can see you're improvements quite clearly compared to other sports and I think that's one of the reasons that keeps me coming back. The climbing community is great as everyone always so encouraging and happy to give advice. I also love competitions as they give me something to work towards before the comp and something to improve on after the comp. They also push my boundaries and at the end of the day there is always something I can take away from the comp. Sometimes it's a spot prize or a cool movement I got or even just tried.

The movement in climbing would have to be the main reason I keep climbing as there is such a huge range of cool movements. The feeling you get when you do a new move or get something you have been working on for a while is indescribable and so rewarding even if no one else sees you.

What events have you got coming up this year? What are your future goals or aspirations in climbing/coaching/route setting? For the rest of the year I mainly have social competitions coming up with a few more serious comps like Boulder Nationals and NIBS (national indoor boulder series). One of my climbing goals is to keep climbing for the joy it brings me but I'm still trying to figure out how far I want to take climbing in my life. Weather I just climb socially for the rest of my life or whether I keep competing for as long as I can, I want to be able to enjoy it. For route setting, I would love to be able to get to the stage where I have the ability and confidence to travel nationally and maybe even internationally to set in different gyms. As for the rest of my goals, I'm still trying to work them out.

> *"I transitioned from a climber to a coach when I started to feel confident enough in my own climbing abilities that I wanted to share climbing with others."*



Meet Rachel Maia

How old were you when you got into climbing? I was 16 when I started climbing. We moved alot and I was starting a new High school, and struggling to feel like I really 'Fit" anywhere. I went along to a climbing group run once a week during school hours and finally found my people and some self-worth. There weren't any labels in the climbing gym, no 'nerds', 'jocks', 'freaks' or 'losers'. We were all just Climbers. I felt at home right away.

What was the situation surrounding your injury leading to your amputation? Can you tell us what climbing looks like for you now? I had a low key controlled bouldering drop with a spotter in a warmup at a climbing competition. I chose to jump down off the top of a problem that had a walk off. There were no downclimbing holds and the problem was too tough for me to downclimb, so before I was at the top I asked my spotter if he had me, and I let go, my spotter taking some weight and breaking the fall. Everything was done as 'right' as I could have. It was unfortunate I landed on a section of flooring that was damaged, and duct taped back together. My feet hit the one spot of the wall to wall soft flooring and I blew through the matts, and through my ankles.

My left ankle was dislocated, fractured in so many places they took some of my hip to make a new piece of ankle and grafted it in. I broke the other ankle too. There was no accountability from the gym, but they gave me a free train ride to the west coast as a "Spot" prize. Queue forehead palm. I went on to have 18 years of chronic pain, disability, degeneration of the left ankle, and 10 surgeries.

One surgery was an Illizarov frame for 4 months. An experiment in New Zealand. I had to slowly wind it apart and separate my ankle joint with a pair of spanners from M10. The surgery didn't work, and I chose to then have an amputation in the hope that I could move on with my life. I then developed neuromas, and a complex set of circumstances in my residual limb that lead to a second amputation on the same leg. The right leg, injured in the accident too, is now also starting to break easily and degenerate. I live in a lot of pain, but climbing is still the thing that helps my mental health and gives me a strong sense of belonging just as it did when I first started.
He aha te mea nui o te ao? He tangata he tangata he tangata. It has always been the people for me.

What is your experience like training in commercial climbing gyms, and how can they improve to support para-climbing more? The details matter, and these details are so often overlooked. I recall in a national event at an indoor gym, rushing to the bathroom for that quick last minute nervous pee. I was using crutches and did not have a prosthetic leg on. I reached for the disability toilet because the doors are wider, and typically close slower, giving time for someone with impaired mobility to move through. We don't always have free hands to close a door, so a special hinge is installed to slowly close the door being us. In this gym, the hinge bracket had been undone, or broken and not repaired. Unfortunately that meant it looked like it was going to shut slowly for me, but it whipped shut so fast it clipped my big toe and lifted my big toe nail up to the base in one feral moment. We cleaned it, taped it down to stop the bleeding, and I shoved my shoe on, and climbed on that one foot for my finals route. Then had to deal with a frothing and painfully infected big toe for 8 weeks, training in a sneaker on my way towards a world Championship. To a 'normie'.... the door hinge was no big deal. But to me, it really mattered.

I could bring up a multitude of small details in any gym that reduces the quality of our experience and our ability to feel like we belong there. But I think it's more helpful instead of picking holes to actually address the fundamental root of inequality. The difference that I've observed between New Zealand and other countries, is that in NZ people that have lived a personal experience with a disability, and identify as disabled, are under represented in employment in gyms. Gyms are not actively seeking to employ at least one member of their team from our minority community. This means there is no one on the floor working that can notice and speak up for these details that make or break our experience.

Tell us about your recent World Cup success, what was your mindset going in? This world Cup was a lesson in the power of self-belief and the messages we tell ourselves. In 2023 a small, tiny fall on my 2-year boulder project "Blue Sky of Mine' in the Magic wood ended in a broken ankle. I knew this problem so well. My spotter was blind, and we didn't want him to get smacked in the face with a prosthetic leg, so we agreed he would step in when I reached the crux. Unfortunatley, I didn't know at this point that the condition in my right ankle had progressed and the joint was severely unstable. I popped off early, and pop. I've had 20 surgeries in my life, and I've always pushed through and had a goal afterward that's helped me recover. I've also been a single mum for 10 years now. So, I've not been very good at rest, and my mental health has often suffered.

When I broke my ankle, I recognised I was at risk of repeating old mistakes and being so afraid of not keeping up with other athletes that might 'push through' and hustle. I didn't feel like my mental health was in a good place at the end of the 2023 circuit. So I just let go. I let go of all the idea that we couldn't slow down and look after ourselves and I just showed up for me. resting my way through the entire 2024 season, having surgery, working on my mental health, and not stepping foot in a gym for a full year. My mindset going into the recent world cup was that this was my moment to believe that if we rest, if we train smarter not harder, if we make our goals a long-distance race.... then maybe when the time is right... it will all come together. I sat in 7th after my first qualifier and thought it was all over. and some friends reminded me my superpower is mindset.. so I just went into route two thinking why not me. Why not today? And by the end of it I sat in a solid second and into Finals.

Finals for me was mentally the most challenging climb in my comp career. I had really bad nerve pain that day, which makes my head very very foggy. The medication I use for this has recently become a banned substance in sport. The system for this for para-athletes is that we must first fail our drug tests, and then we can retrospectively file our medical therapeutic exemption paperwork. I had all of this with me, and I had discussed it with someone from New Zealand High Performance. But in the moment I did not have a coach or team manager or anyone there to support me in this, I felt so much anxiety about if I made a mistake in the paper work, that I didn't take my routine pain medications. These are some of the challenges we face as athletes in a minority country with lack of support. I was distracted, and 'glitchy' in my climbing. with an early foot pop, I had to take a moment on the wall to stop and tell myself "pull your freaking shit together woman, make this count!'

I then took a moment to just smile and appreciate the crowd and climbed my way into a tie for 3rd. My bronze was awarded on count-back to qualifiers. I was really proud of myself. There was a lot going on for me personally to be able to come back from a year off, living in a city without access to climbing, and step into the arena with the belief that I had worked hard enough to make it

happen, honestly it's a moment I'm really proud of. It's never really about the medal. It's about becoming our best self and having a voice. And this World Cup gave me both of those things. I'm grateful for the people that supported me to get there. I'm so so grateful.

What were the routes like? Did you feel challenged physically on the routes? The first route was about endurance, which I knew I was a bit behind in right now. I think many felt was a throw away and a little sandbagged.... I felt frustrated looking at it as it seemed like we were not going to get good division. It was very easy to a point, then had one blocker move that I anticipated would spit everyone off. I wasn't confident in how the scoring worked and without a coach there to guide me I got it in my head that I would just have to go fast in case it came down to time. Rushing, I made a mistake and felt so frustrated by the outcome. I was in 7th, 2.5 points behind the lead where six people tied for 1st. That's over half the athletes. Learning the valuable lesson that it doesn't matter how fast you go if you don't climb high enough. The second route was the harder and more technical route, and I knew I excelled in that often. I placed second, half a point behind our reigning 5 x world champ, with a solid gap before the next athlete break. 7 athletes came off on the same crux. All in all, for qualifiers, I was consistent in being right behind our reigning world champ. I do believe there's a gold out there for me, I just have to learn to keep my head together. Finals saw a tie again, and although I had more in me, I didn't have my head together. I can do better. I know it.

What was the mental pressure like in that environment and how did you cope? It both feels like you're around your chosen family, which is so wholesome, and as the only athlete from NZ its also isolating. I feel the support from people back home deeply, but the reality is that in the moment you're out there, you're on your own. And as we look ahead to my now 4-year journey toward the Olympics, I felt so much pressure to perform so that it might help in gaining access to funding. I'm fully self-funded, working three part time jobs, raising kids, and no access to climbing in my city. Preparing the finances for one World Cup felt awfully uncomfortable asking for help. I loathe this part of it. The message I've been given around finding funding moving forward through high performance, is that I had to "prove myself this year' and then it will be considered. So, I certainly felt a lot of pressure on myself to make the podium and if I didn't.

Realistically I may have to quit. My capacity when living in chronic pain is so low, climbing is the one time I feel less unhinged by the pain, but things like managing the mental load of funding competing is often feeling unmanageable. And that's really sad because I have the potential to make gold, to make my country proud, to represent for youth with disabilities who need to see role models out there that they identify with, there's a 15 year old girl out there living with a disability, that doesn't feel like she belongs in this world. If she had the self-belief to try a new sport, maybe she'd find a community that becomes her family and saves her life. I've come home with zero dollars in my account, and a need to book South Korea (for a competition). And I have no idea how to step towards that as well as keep training and parenting.

Para climbing has just been announced for the LA Olympic Games 2028. How does this affect you and your next goals, are you an Olympic hopeful? A very small number of sport classes have been selected for what is called an 'exhibition' event at the LA2028 Paralympics. My category, Women's AL2, is one of them. We have gender equity in the medal count which is amazing, but it is still for lack of a better description, an experiment. Can we make it a spectacular success for the visibility of our sport...? that's the question really. As para-climbers we are invested in seeing the included sport classes grow. Starting small is realistic to set us up to succeed long term, but it's still gutting to see some very hard-working athletes miss out on this historic opportunity to contribute to our sport in this way. So, we are looking ahead to LA28 with the goal of making our community bloody proud, and putting such a solid effort in that in the future we see our whole adaptive community with equal opportunityI hope the next four years will not just be about trying to qualify for the paralympics, but about living a life with impact. I don't want to just exist for myself... i want to keep having a voice, keep advocating, and continue to sprinkle a little sunshine into the sharp edges of life for those of us living as chronic pain warriors. We still deserve to create a life we love. And I am determined to keep doing just that.

Tūroa Ski Area, Mt Ruapehu

WINTER REIGNS IN RUAPEHU

From snow sports to legendary live music and one-of-a-kind dining experiences, August offers a mix of winter loving events that invites you to come stay and play in Ruapehu – the North Island's top winter hub.

Beautiful Views along Te Hangāruru

Fork and Flame, Tūroa

What's on?

Go Pink for Breast Cancer at Tūroa, Mt Ruapehu Saturday 2 August
Dust off that pink wig and get ready to ride the slopes in style.

Quix ft. Benny Boy, XL7, Jarno at Powderhorn Chateau Saturday 2 August
Global bass juggernaut Quix returns to his roots with a stacked local lineup. From heavy drops to glitchy grooves, this one's for the heads.

Twilight Ski & Music at Whakapapa, Mt Ruapehu from Saturday 2 August
Make the most of the mountain with extra ski laps into the evening, then unwind with live music and a sundowner on the deck at Lorenz's Bar & Café at Whakapapa, Mt Ruapehu. Held 2 and 23 August 2025.

Fork and Flame at Tūroa at Tūroa, Mt Ruapehu from Saturday 2 August
Après ski means discovering the Fork and Flame dining experience at Tūroa after dark. Swap your skis to something spectacularly you and enjoy mountain top dining at the top of Mt Ruapehu dining at Freddie's Tasting Lounge – a tantalising atmosphere full of warmth, flavour and mountain charm. With a carefully curated eight course menu celebrating bold New Zealand flavours and seasonal alpine ingredients, this is an alpine dining invitation you won't want to miss. Kicks off 2 August and runs fortnightly – transport from Ohakune Junction included with ticket.

Girls Who Shred at Tūroa, Mt Ruapehu Saturday 9 August
Back by popular demand! Girls Who Shred is a social park day for female skiers and snowboarders of all levels. Whether you're learning your first trick or already shredding with style, this event is all about progression, good vibes, and community. Come ride, connect, and celebrate the stoke.

Liquid Lowdown ft. Chiccoreli & Tali, Rhyas, Kurt Kokaine & Westeria at Powderhorn Chateau Saturday 9 August
An immersive night of smooth liquid DnB featuring NZ heavyweights Chiccoreli & Tali. Support from rising acts keeps the flow steady and the vibes warm.

The Queens of Country and The King Elvis at Royal Theatre Raetihi Saturday 16 August
The King Elvis & The Queens of Country brings together electrifying performances that pay tribute to the iconic sounds of Elvis Presley and country music's greatest queens. With vibrant costumes, toe-tapping tunes, and a hearty supper included, this evening promises soul, sass, and Southern charm.

For event updates check out **www.visitruapehu.com/events**

Whakapapa Ski Area, Mt Ruapehu

Tūroa Parks Rail Jam at Tūroa Ski Area Saturday 23 August
Riders are given a timed window to hit the park where they will be judged on style, difficulty, execution, variety, and overall impression. The Tūroa Rail Jam is a fun and exciting event for every keen park rider. Categories include: male and female; ski and snowboard; open age group.

North Island Primary & Intermediate Schools Champs (NIPS) at Whakapapa, Mt Ruapehu 24–27 August
After a six-year break, NIPS is back! Join us at Whakapapa for the return of the North Island Primary and Intermediate School Ski Champs, last held in 2019. This year marks a fresh chapter, with NIPS now officially sanctioned by Snowsports NZ.
This inclusive, team-based event welcomes all primary and intermediate students from across the North Island. Whether you're a seasoned racer or new to the sport, NIPS offers a fun, safe, and supportive environment to experience Alpine Ski Racing—where school spirit meets mountain adventure.
Event Schedule:

- Sunday 24 August – Training Day (Intermediate) / Training + Weather Day (Primary)
- Monday 25 August – Day 1 | Giant Slalom (GS)
- Tuesday 26 August – Day 2 | Dual Slalom
- Wednesday 27 August – Weather Day (Primary only)

Get your school involved and be part of the first NIPS in over half a decade!

King Kapisi at Powderhorn Chateau Saturday 30 August
Aotearoa hip hop royalty. King Kapisi hits the Powderhorn stage for an unforgettable performance, weaving conscious rhymes, deep grooves, and fierce energy.

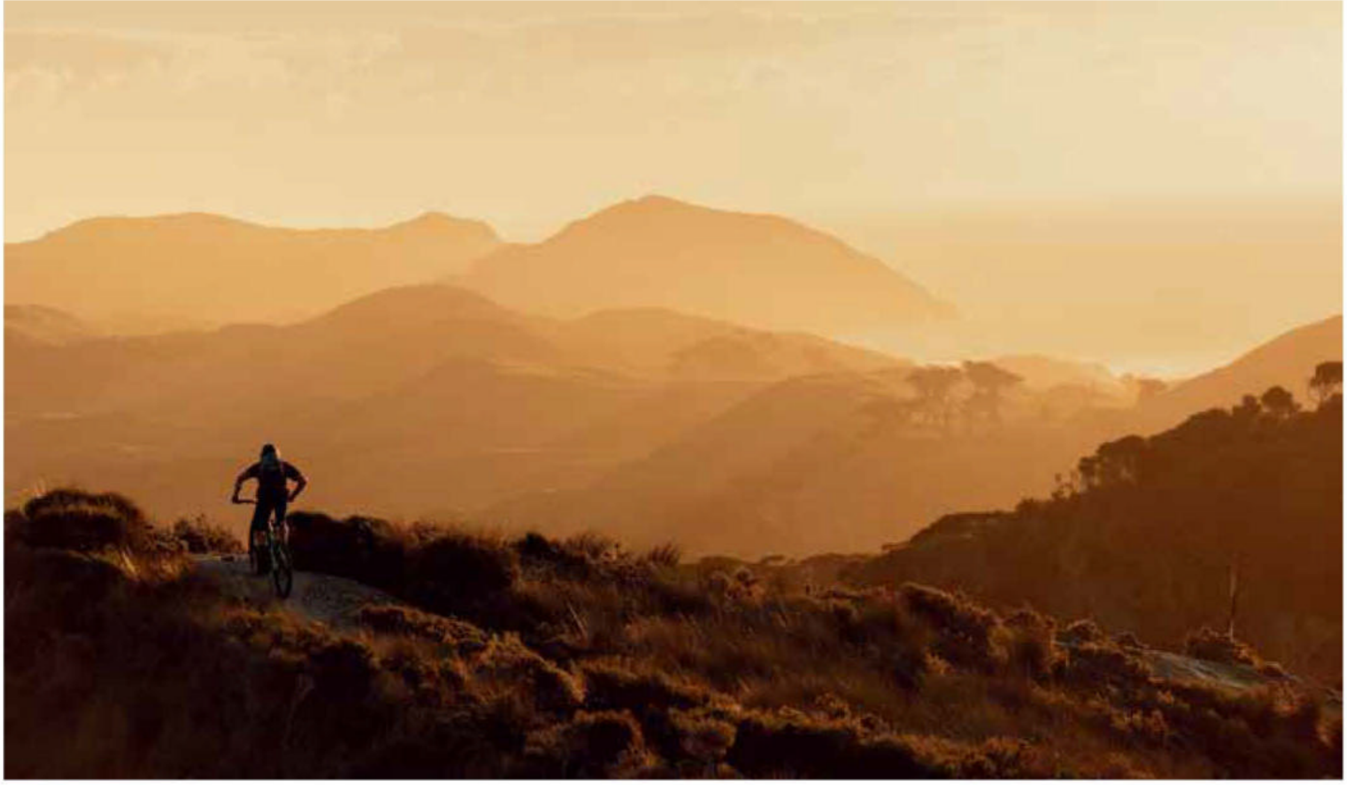
What's new?

Eat at The Station café Waimarino
After a complete refurbishment and new ownership, the Station café in Waimarino (formerly National Park Village) has now reopened in the charming railway station beside the Park n Ride hub. Enjoy sublime coffee and cakes, divine breakfast items like Brioche French Toast as well as other delicious menu items including a refreshing halloumi and watermelon salad and a tasty beef, bacon and mushroom ragout.

Sleep at Tongariro Crossing Lodge
Six brand new premium one-bedroom garden suites have recently opened for bookings and added to the Tongariro Crossing Lodge offering right in the heart of Waimarino. This boutique bed and breakfast provides a silver-service style breakfast ranging from continental to classic cooked as well as in-room continental breakfast baskets - options for packed lunches are also available.

Play at Te Hangāruru
Te Hangāruru is a spectacular new section of the Mountains to Sea – Ngā Ara Tūhono Great Ride — another key part of the long-awaited off-road connection between Horopito and Waimarino. The 9km southern section from Horopito to Pōkākā Road is now open, complementing the 9km northern section through the restored Marton Sash & Door tramway (rideable as an 18km loop).
Key features:
- Two new suspension bridges, including a 30m crossing over the Mangaturuturu River
- Flowing trail through regenerating forest and historic tramway corridor
- A dramatic 1950s SH4 "Deep Creek" waterfall diversion
- Deep iwi connection – gifted by Uenuku, this is a corridor of cultural and physical connection, alongside SH4 and the North Island Main Trunk line

Final section still to come: A 225m suspension bridge over the Makatote River will complete the trail — support needed to finish it: mountainstosea.nz/support



EDEN: THE ULTIMATE TRAIL GUIDE TO NEW ZEALAND'S MOUNTAIN BIKE MECCA

THE VERDICT: This isn't just another coffee table book gathering dust on your shelf. Eden is pure trail porn that'll have you booking flights to the Southern Hemisphere before you've finished the first chapter.

Nick Stevenson has done something extraordinary here. Working with some of the sport's most respected lensmen and riders, he's captured what every mountain biker already knows but struggles to articulate: New Zealand isn't just another riding destination—it's the promised land of dirt, rocks, and endless flow.

From the volcanic moonscapes of Rotorua to the alpine majesty of Queenstown's Skyline, Eden showcases why Kiwi trails have become legendary. The photography is stunning—these aren't sanitised marketing shots but raw, authentic captures of riders pushing limits against some of the most dramatic backdrops on Earth.

The book reads like a love letter to the sport's evolution in New Zealand, documenting how a handful of passionate riders carved out what's now considered the global gold standard for trail building and riding culture. The essays weave between technical trail breakdowns and deeply personal stories from the athletes who've shaped New Zealand's mountain biking identity.

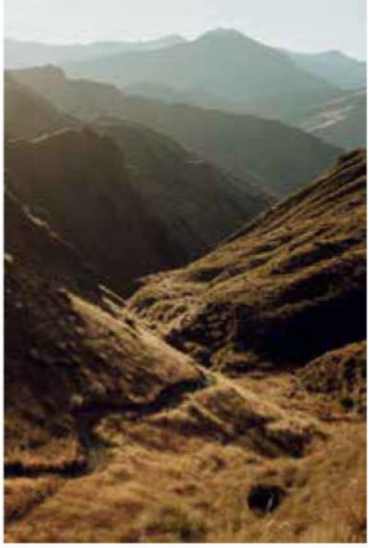
STANDOUT FEATURES
The trail guides are practical gold. GPS coordinates, difficulty ratings, and insider tips from locals who know every root and rock garden by name. But it's the storytelling that elevates this beyond a simple guidebook—each chapter reads like sitting around a campfire with the legends who built these trails.

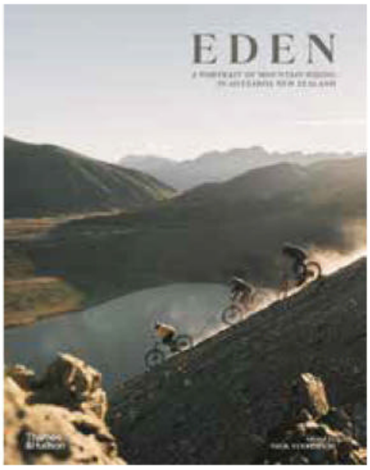
Stevenson's background in film and branded content shines through in the visual storytelling. Every page spread feels cinematic, capturing not just the riding but the soul of New Zealand's mountain biking culture.

Whether you're plotting your next epic adventure or just need to feed your wanderlust during the off-season, or looking for a perfect gift, Eden delivers. It's part guidebook, part photography masterpiece, and part cultural document of mountain biking's meteoric rise in the adventure capital of the world.

Eden is ideal for trail junkies, adventure photographers, New Zealand obsessives, and anyone who believes the best adventures happen on two wheels.

You're serious about experiencing world-class mountain biking, or you just want to vicariously experience the trails that have redefined what's possible on a mountain bike.





Eden by Nick Stevenson, published by Thames & Hudson Australia, RRP:AUD $79.99

SPIRITED WOMEN'S ADVENTURE RACE

Spreads it's wings

> *"This event defines the spirit of a kiwi woman – her give-it-a-go attitude, sense of adventure, a strong belief in her girlfriends and a desire to help them through difficult times and celebrate the good times."*
> *The spirit of a kiwi woman.*

Organised by Dare2Sweat Events, the Spirited Women – All Women's Adventure Race has been a firm favourite on the New Zealand race calendar since it launched in Rotorua in 2016. The event has traversed both the North and South Islands taking place in Taupo, Whakatane, Gisborne, Alexandra, Whangarei, Marlborough, the Central Hawke's Bay, Wānaka, Cromwell and Clyde. Having reached a whopping World record 500 teams of four at the 2023 event in Wanaka, the 2026 and 13th edition of the event is set to occur in in the scenic town of Twizel in the Legendary Mackenzie region with a cap of 402 teams. The Twizel edition will be Dare2Sweat event's first event as part of the Adventure Racing World Series (ARWS) and they are thrilled.

ARWS CEO Heidi Muller commented; "As a female racer myself, I know how much fun an all-women's race is and I'm delighted to welcome Spirited Women to our global adventure racing family. Women's racing is one of the fastest growing sectors of our sport, and as the ARWS expands and adapts we'll include more women's races in our regional calendars".

"As the best presented adventure race in New Zealand, and the biggest in the world, Spirited Women is a wonderful addition to the series, and through the largest global media platform for Adventure Racing, the ARWS can share the incredible work the Spirited Women team is doing in the women's arena with others around the world. I certainly hope I can go and participate in the Twizel Spirited Women event in 2026!"

Event Manager Debbie Chambers explained the concept and success of the race. "Spirited Women is where women team up, train and have an absolute blast of an adventure together, side by side all the way. We want to empower women to make time for themselves and to broaden their outdoor skills and most of all to live their best life. Our key focus over the past 12 editions has been on building confidence and showing all our women that they are capable of a lot more than they think."

"Event Director Neil Gellatly loves to set challenging courses and dream up mystery activities that firmly but gently push participants out of their comfort zone. He believes this aspect of the Spirited Women events sets it apart from other similar events".

"It's far more than creating an unforgettable event experience shared among girlfriends; it's about women making time for themselves and prioritizing their health and fitness. For many participants, the journey to the event is the most cherished part. Regularly getting together as a team to train, learn new skills, and support one another to push their boundaries. The Spirited Women event strengthens bonds and relationships, bringing family, friends, and work colleagues together."

Both Neil and Debbie are excited to be part of the global drive to grow the numbers of women participating in adventure racing and hope that the Spirited Women event will be an attractive event for women from all around the world looking to get out of their comfort zone and take on a challenge.

This is what some of the Spirited Women participants said about their last Spirited women event…

“So good having something to motivate me to get fit post-kids and enjoying a weekend away adventuring with great friends without our kids! The paddle and river float were the most "fun" legs of the race."

"Time away, being outside and moving in lots of different ways. The opportunity to do things like Abseiling the dam. I loved the whole event. What special event planners and marshals you have!!"

"The whole experience was great - great location, great course layout, fun and mentally challenging mystery activities."

"The camaraderie and the fact that there were novice competitors as well as professional athletes but the fact that everyone came together to have a spirited and amazing experience."

"It was a great balance of grit, frustration, achievement and fun. This was our first time doing medium length course (have previously done Intro and Short) and we loved the extra MA's and have a new love/hate relationship”

The Spirited Women – All Women’s adventure race goes above and beyond to make sure that all participants have the adventure of a lifetime and enjoy a weekend away with their besties.

This is the ultimate adventure race for women, who want to get more out of life by getting out of their comfort zone, overcoming their fears but most of all proving that they can do anything and that they are proud to be called Spirited Women.

If you are looking for a new lease on life, for a break from the day-to-day grind or simply a weekend of love and laughter with your female friends, family or colleagues then you need to consider entering the thirteenth edition of the Spirited Women Event scheduled to be held in Twizel from the 20th-22nd February 2026. Lock in your next adventure by securing your team a spot now and join in on all the fun.

For all the event details and to enter visit **www.spiritedwomen.co.nz**

Spirited Women

ALL WOMEN'S ADVENTURE RACE

Muster your girlfriends for a fun, adventurous get-away, navigating the Mackenzie Country by foot, Mtb and kayak, complete with mystery activities.

Twizel 20th – 22nd February 2026

Secure your team entry at www.spiritedwomen.co.nz

"Defining the spirit of a kiwi woman – her give-it-a-go attitude, sense of adventure, a strong belief in her girlfriends and a desire to help them through difficult times and celebrate the good times."

TRAILBLAZERS

How Women Are Redefining Adventure – Together

In Morocco's High Atlas, a small group of trekkers pause beneath the snow-dusted shoulders of Mt Toubkal. In India's Zanskar Valley, a rope team steps across glacier-fed ridges en route to Kun's 7,077-metre summit. On the ancient Camino in Spain, a line of women walk and write their stories into every step.

From high-altitude expeditions to slow cultural journeys, more women are not just stepping into adventure, they're shaping it. They're leading it. And they're redesigning it on their own terms.

This isn't about pink-hued brochures or dialled-down difficulty. It's about presence. Confidence. Community. And as the outdoor world begins to better reflect the diversity of those who explore it, the impact reaches far beyond the trail.

A Walk of Her Own

When ***Natalie Tambolash***, General Manager of World Expeditions New Zealand, first stepped into the active travel industry, it wasn't to follow a well-marked route.

"I wasn't chasing a job title," she says. "I was chasing something that felt real. A space where women could take up space, be it in the mountains, on the decision-making team, or around the campfire."

That clarity has shaped how World Expeditions (now in its 50th year) approaches leadership and trip design. Its Women-Led and Women-Only treks continue to grow, reflecting a broader shift where connection and shared lived experience are often just as valuable as the destination.

But it's not about exclusion, it's about choice. "There's a certain magic that happens on women's trips," says Nat. "There's space for challenge and humour, for silence and celebration. And there's a kind of unspoken understanding that no one has to explain why they're here."

Women at the Helm

World Expeditions has pioneered the empowerment of women in adventure travel since it was founded in 1975. With a female CEO (Sue Badyari) at the helm for 30 years, female guides leading treks all over the world, and women driving impact across operations, product development and leadership roles, this is a brand that doesn't just talk about equality – it builds it into every expedition. Among the standout voices of this movement are women who not only lead trips but change how leadership looks and feels.

Lydia Bradey, the first woman to summit Everest without supplemental oxygen, brings a unique lens to every expedition. This season, she's guiding three bold, high-altitude adventures with World Expeditions:

- Bhutan Snowman Trek – a 27-day epic often considered the most challenging long-distance trek on earth
- Ojos del Salado Volcano (6,893m), Chile – a technical ascent through the world's highest volcanic range
- Kun Expedition (7,077m), India – a rarely attempted climb through Zanskar's remote alpine corridors

Participants don't just follow Lydia – they walk beside her, gaining so much from her wisdom and decades of experience as a trekker.

Margie Thomas, another leader with deep Himalayan ties, continues to guide transformative treks for World Expeditions through Bhutan, Lo Manthang and Nepal. Her extensive work in Upper Mustang including women's healthcare, cultural restoration and education initiatives, has made her a fixture in the communities she visits.

Fun on the trail

> *There's a certain magic that happens on women's trips,"*

Closer to home, ***Laura Waters***, author of Bewildered, will lead two Larapinta Trail departures with Australian Walking Holidays in 2026. Designed for reflection and reconnection, Laura's trips are a blend of journaling, nature immersion and walking with intention – a reminder that challenge and softness can co-exist.

Introducing Suzy Muir: Wild by Nature

In June 2026, Australian Walking Holidays will launch two very special Larapinta departures led by Suzy Muir, runner-up on Alone Australia (which, incidentally, was filmed here in NZ) and a lifelong wilderness advocate.

Suzy lives completely off-grid in Victoria with her husband Jon Muir OAM, harvesting, foraging, and crafting from the land around her. Her unique background – from decades of remote adventure to 63 solitary days on Alone (filmed in Aotearoa New Zealand) – shapes her approach to guiding.
The two new trips, designed in close collaboration with Suzy, have distinct themes:

1. Journey for Emerging Adventurers (04–11 June 2026)

Designed for young adults, this departure encourages solo travellers to build confidence in remote landscapes. With a supportive environment and Suzy's gentle mentorship, it's about learning the rhythms of wild living, incorporating wilderness survival and reading country. This special journey teaches how the wild can become a place of personal growth and calm.

2. Story, Stillness & Connection (18–25 June 2026)

Open to all ages, this walk invites participants to slow down and listen – to the land, to one another, and to their own stories. With time for reflection, storytelling and Suzy's own insights from a life off-grid, it's a trek for those craving depth over distance.

On both trips, Suzy shares not only survival skills – but a way of seeing. Her storytelling unpacks big journeys and quiet moments, offering a new kind of courage: the one that comes from stillness.

In addition to its women-led trips, World Expeditions also offers five women-only adventures; three on the Larapinta trail, and two in Nepal.

"There's a quiet shift happening on the world's wild trails, and it's being led by women."

Margie Thomas guides treks for World Expeditions through Bhutan, Lo Manthang and Nepal

Why Women-Only Adventures Matter
Not every woman wants a women-only trip. But for many, particularly solo travellers in their 40s, 50s and beyond, it's a revelation.

"These aren't diluted versions of our treks," says Nat. "They're remote, physically demanding, and fully supported. The difference is the energy."

Shared understanding, safety and space all play a part. But the most common post-trip reflection? "I didn't realise how much I needed that."

Whether it's swapping stories at 4,000 metres or sitting in silence beneath desert stars, the moments are unscripted but deeply felt.

High Roads & Higher Hopes: World Expeditions Turns 50
In 1975, a small group of Australians set out on a trail few in their country had walked before. It was World Expeditions' first trek, a bold leap into the heart of the Himalaya at a time when "adventure travel" was still in its infancy.

Fast forward fifty years, and the landscape may have shifted (satellite phones, solar chargers, and soft-shell jackets) but the soul of the experience remains the same. This spring, World Expeditions will mark its 50th anniversary by returning to the country where it all began: Nepal.

World Expeditions' landmark 50th anniversary will culminate on September 24, 2025, with a celebration unlike any other—at 3,867 metres, in the spectacular Himalayan village of Thyangboche, nestled in the shadow of Mount Everest. This event will bring together trekkers from nine commemorative journeys to honour the company's pioneering legacy in adventure travel. Two women-led expeditions will spotlight the strength and leadership of women in adventure tourism.

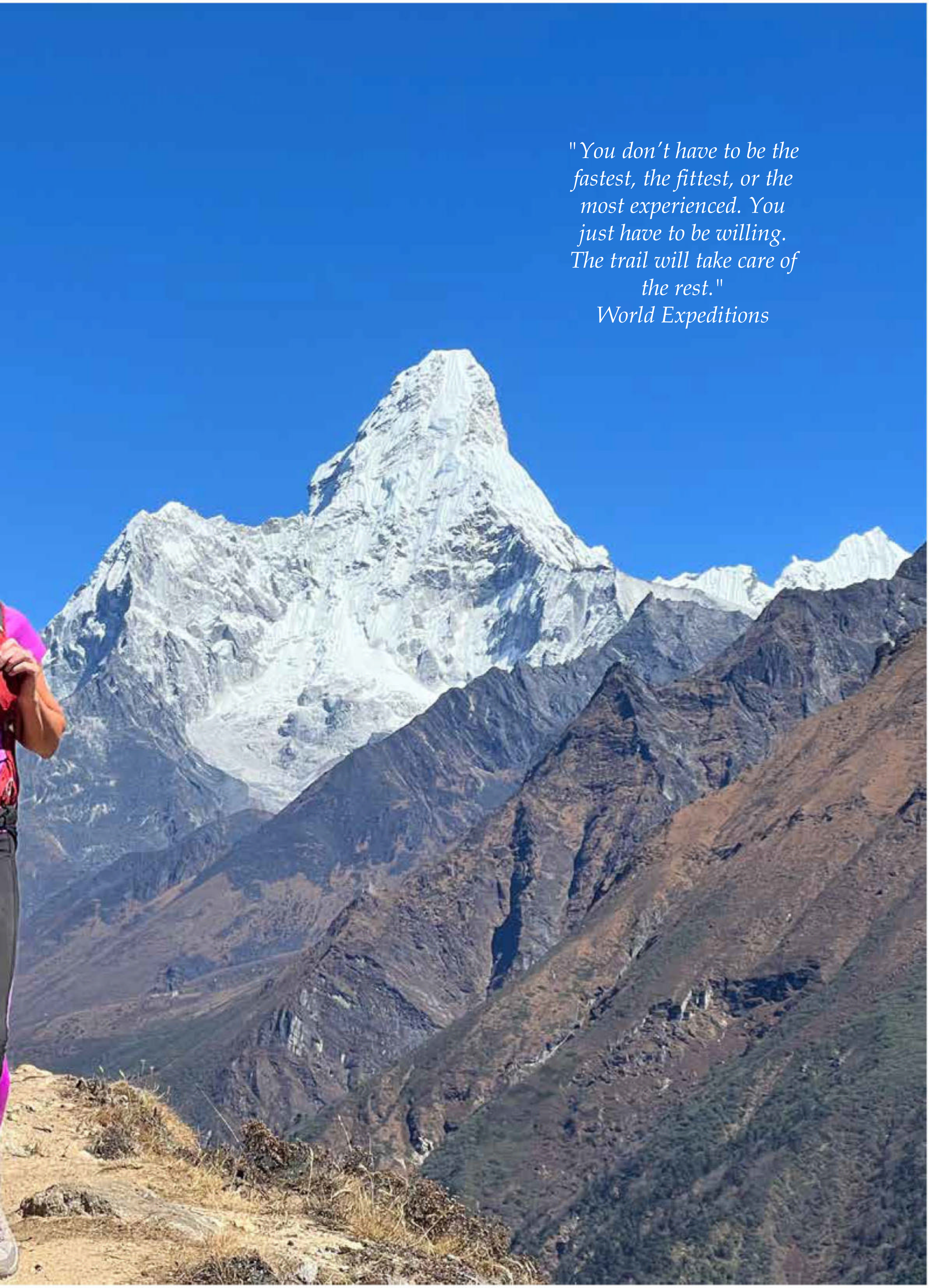
- A Khumbu trek led by Margie Thomas, bringing her decades of Himalayan insight
- A women-only 50th Anniversary trek with Sherry Ott, international travel writer, combining outdoor exploration with cultural immersion.

A Community That Keeps Growing
As the industry evolves, so do its travellers. More women in midlife are turning toward multi-day treks, cultural journeys and bold challenges. What they seek is time. Meaning. And momentum.

"It's not about ticking off peaks," says Laura Waters. "It's about what gets revealed when you're willing to walk with yourself for a while."

Thinking of Taking the First Step?
You don't have to be the fastest, the fittest, or the most experienced. You just have to be willing. The trail will take care of the rest.

Visit **www.worldexpeditions.co.nz** to learn more.



"You don't have to be the fastest, the fittest, or the most experienced. You just have to be willing. The trail will take care of the rest."
World Expeditions

THE REVOLUTION OF WOMEN'S OUTDOOR CLOTHING

Breaking the Pink-and-Shrink Paradigm

Over the past decade, the outdoor adventure industry has undergone a remarkable transformation, particularly in women's-specific clothing—and New Zealand has not been left behind. What once amounted to "pink-and-shrink" versions of men's gear is now a rapidly growing, technically advanced segment that recognises the unique physiology, needs, and preferences of female adventurers. In Aotearoa, where hiking, climbing, skiing, and multi-day tramping are national pastimes, brands like Outdoor Research, Rab, and Black Diamond are leading the way in delivering women's outdoor gear that performs as hard as Kiwi women do.

A Market on the Rise – Especially in New Zealand
The global outdoor apparel market was valued at US$17.47 billion in 2024 and continues to grow steadily. More significantly, women now represent nearly half of all outdoor gear purchases, a shift that's also visible in New Zealand's thriving retail space, from Torpedo7 to Bivouac Outdoor, and through independent stores and specialist gear shops.

Locally, women are not just buying gear for themselves, they're also the decision-makers for family, group, and community-based adventures. This rising consumer power is transforming what brands are offered in New Zealand and how they're designed.

Breaking the Pink-and-Shrink Cycle
The outdated model of shrinking men's gear and colouring it bright pink has given way to purpose-built designs for women's bodies and adventure styles. For example, Rab's Women's Microlight Alpine Down Jacket, stocked in many Kiwi stores, features a tailored fit with zoned insulation, allowing women to move efficiently while staying warm on alpine ascents or chilly campsites.

Likewise, Outdoor Research's women-specific Ferrosi Hooded Jacket, popular among NZ trampers and climbers, is engineered with flexible, breathable fabric that moves with the body during scrambles or technical routes, and layers comfortably under a pack or over a base layer.

Technical Innovations Fit for Kiwi Terrain
Women's technical clothing now accounts for different body heat distribution, motion patterns, and layering requirements. For example:

- Rab's Nebula Insulated Jacket uses body-mapped insulation to keep the core warm without overheating during ascents.
- Black Diamond's Women's Equipment line, including harnesses and alpine packs, has been fine-tuned to align with the female form, improving fit on everything from steep ice to alpine ridgelines.
- New Zealand-based adventurers are increasingly seeking gear that works across four seasons, and many brands have responded with versatile layering systems that reflect this need.

Even undergarments and baselayers have evolved, merino-blend pieces, like those offered by Mons Royale (a Wanaka-born brand) and Icebreaker, have become staples for Kiwi women thanks to their odour resistance, breathability, and ethical sourcing.

Sustainability with a Southern Hemisphere Lens
Women in New Zealand's outdoor community are also driving the sustainability conversation. Many seek out recycled materials, long-lasting gear, and ethical production as non-negotiables.

Outdoor Research and Rab both now use bluesign®-approved fabrics and offer repair programmes, while Patagonia's Worn Wear initiative has found eager support across NZ through workshops and repair hubs.

Body Inclusivity and Comfort: More Than Just Size
The Kiwi outdoor scene, historically built around hard-charging mountaineers and lean alpine athletes, has expanded to include women of all sizes, ages, and backgrounds. Brands like Nobodies Princess, founded in Australia and now available in New Zealand, cater specifically to plus-sized adventurers, creating technical gear that fits properly and performs under pressure.

Rab and Black Diamond have both extended their sizing and offer adjustable harnesses, outerwear, and layering systems that cater to a wide range of body types and adventure styles, from multi-day hikes on the Te Araroa to ski touring in the Southern Alps.

Other brands including Merrell, Salewa and Marmot, also offer a robust lineup designed just for women, including technical boots, shoes, outdoor apparel, and backpacks, all tailored to female fit and ergonomics.

Community-Driven Design and Real-World Testing
One of the most powerful forces behind this transformation has been community input. Women's outdoor forums, tramping clubs, and social media groups in NZ now frequently share real-world feedback on gear performance. This grassroots testing has influenced everything from fit adjustments to the placement of pockets and zips that accommodate women's gear loads.

Brands like Wild Rye (available online to Kiwi buyers) and Hikerkind have championed this community-based development model. Similarly, local initiatives such as She Moves Mountains NZ and Adventure Girls NZ amplify female voices in the outdoors, helping shape the next generation of adventure gear through direct engagement.

A Revolution That Benefits Everyone
What started as a push for better women's gear has created innovation across the board. The attention to detail; fit, comfort, thermoregulation, and movement, has elevated design for all adventurers. When brands engineer for women, the entire outdoor community gains access to more considered, better-performing products.

Angela Van Wiemeersch climbs the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, USA, Photographer Andy Mann; courtesy Red Bull

SMN

OSPREY TEMPEST VELOCITY 20
RRP $319.99

Light-and-fast, multi-sport versatility: the all-new Tempest Velocity 20 ups the ante on speed and efficiency for your pursuits.

With a running-vest-inspired harness, flexible backpanel and lightweight design, it provides access to the essentials without skipping a beat.
A certified bluesign® product.

OSPREY TEMPEST 22
RRP $299.99

Whether you're hiking peaks or pedaling, the woman's specific Tempest 22 is an ideal carry solution.

This lightweight pack features a breathable AirScapeTM backpanel and continuous-wrap harness and hipbelt that move with you. Enjoy versatile pocketing on the harness, hipbelt and front panel, plus the trekking pole, ice axe and bike helmet attachments that make this a truly multi-sport pack.
A certified bluesign® product.

OSPREY TEMPEST PRO 40
RRP $449.99

Tempest Pro is designed to be lightweight, fast-moving and thoroughly featured to effectively adapt to the multi-sport demands of on-the-go adventurers and athletes.

Whether you're hauling gear into the alpine, cragging with a full rack or bikepacking solo, this pack is faster, stronger and lighter than ever. A new torso adjustment and premium injection-molded framesheet allow for an enhanced fit across a variety of torso ranges. Pro-worthy NanoFly™ fabric makes this pack extra tough.
A certified bluesign® product.

CAMELBAK M.U.L.E 100 OZ HYDRATION PACK WOMENS RRP $219.99

M.U.L.E.® Hydration Backpacks are already MTB's best friend, and the updated classic go-to pack is exciting for women.

It's the perfect size, comes with premium hydration and has all the features to make every bike adventure awesome.

It utilises body-mapping technology for a tailored fit and excellent cooling. The S-curved shoulder harness is contoured to fit a woman's body, while providing increased comfort and stability.

CAMELBAK TRAIL RUN™ VEST WITH TWO 17OZ QUICK STOW™ FLASKS RRP $199.99

Explore every corner, every peak, and every valley with the Women's Trail Run™ Vest.

It is built to get you there, with room for everything you need to explore, and the reflective detailing to keep you safe.

The tough nylon construction and women-specific fit provides comfort and stability. It offers a tailored fit and excellent cooling, thanks to body mapping technology and features an S-curved shoulder harness for comfort and stability.

CAMELBAK CHASE™ ADVENTURE 8 HYDRATION VEST WITH CRUX® 2L RESERVOIR RRP $249.99

The Women's Chase™ Adventure 8 Vest is rugged enough to tackle any trail without thinking twice.

Made from lightweight 420D recycled nylon, it's rugged, but stays breathable for longer rides.

The women's specific fit combined with the stable, bounce-free design keeps your vest secure, stable, and comfortable. With ample space and thoughtful organisation, every detail is designed to help you charge ahead with confidence.

CAMELBAK ZEPHYR™ PRO VEST WITH TWO 17OZ QUICK STOW™ FLASKS RRP $279.99

Whether you're a hardcore ultra-marathoner, weekend warrior, or testing your personal limits, the Women's Zephyr™ Pro Vest is engineered to maximise your comfort and performance.

Race-ready features, like mesh zones for ventilation, stowable trekking pole quiver, and dual adjustable straps give you room to customise. The torso length is designed to fit a woman's body, and every detail is made with ultra-light materials.

BLACK DIAMOND SOLUTION HARNESS
RRP $169.99

Our purpose-built sport climber's harness, the Women's Solution features Fusion Comfort Technology, a women's-specific rise and fit that will form to your body.

Fusion Comfort Technology introduces three separate strands of low-profile webbing in both the fixed leg loops and waist to create superior load distribution while reducing pressure on sensitive points. Designed to fit the contours of your body, the Solution maximises freedom of movement and comfort, without sacrificing performance.

BLACK DIAMOND COEFFICIENT LT QUARTER ZIP PULLOVER
RRP $269.99

A lightweight version of our Coefficient fleece, the Coefficient LT Quarter Zip is a performance midlayer built for high-output activities.

Featuring Polartec® Power Grid® fleece with a gridded interior for increased wicking performance and added breathability, the center-front quarter zip allows you to dump heat on the go, while the hoodless-style makes this an easy layer with other hooded jackets.

BLACK DIAMOND FINELINE SHELL
RRP $349.99

Alpine squalls or urban downpours, the Fineline Stretch Rain Shell can handle it all

Featuring the BD.dry™ waterproof/breathable/windproof solution, the Fineline is a fully featured rain shell. With DWR sealed pit zip vents, two zippered hand pockets and a waterproof center front zipper, the Fineline comes prepared for the wettest conditions but quickly adapts for moderate weather. Underarm gussets and ultra-stretchy fabric add mobility and durability, while the climbing-helmet-compatible hood makes it perfect for on-route escapades. Adjustable hem and cuffs dial in the fit, and when the sun comes out, the shell stows into the right-hand pocket and clips to a harness or bag with a carabiner clip loop.

BLACK DIAMOND ALPENGLOW HOODY
RRP $179.99

For long, exposed approaches, summit naps and sunny sessions at the crag, the Black Diamond Alpenglow Hoody keeps you covered when sunscreen just won't cut it.

UPF-40+ and BD.cool mineral-based in-fiber cooling technology reflects 71% of near-infrared rays and reduces wearers' perceived temperature. A layer of protection to your arsenal, with an under-the-helmet hood and pullover design, plus Polygiene odor control, the Alpenglow hoody offers the ultimate in performance and long-wearing comfort.

Find a Stockist: southernapproach.co.nz
IG and FB @southernapproachnz

SCARPA SPIN PLANET
RRP $329.99

The ideal shoes for runners who are pursuing long distances on the trail.

Light on your feet and light on the planet, the Spin Planet is a highly cushioned trail running shoe with the midsole volume designed to absorb impact. It has serious sustainability chops, with the upper, midsole and outsole all featuring significant recycled content.

SCARPA RIBELLE RUN 2
RRP $349.99

The trail running shoe for those who are looking for absolute precision and high adaptability on any degree of difficulty or type of terrain.

The new 3S Frame (Secure, Stable, Sensitive) completely wraps around the shoe structure ensuring unparalleled support and protection. It is designed for short to medium distance trail and skyrunning.

LORNA JANE LIMITED EDITION LOTUS CROP SPORTS BRA

RRP: $85.00

Experience all day support and comfort in this Lotus Crop Sports Bra! Crafted from sweat wicking Nothing 2 See Here™ fabric in a classic cropped, scoop neck silhouette, this bra features a strappy back design inspired by iconic Lotus Longline Sports Bra, with limited edition branding. The perfect blend of style and comfort this bra is your ideal companion for Pilates, yoga and all your favourite low intensity workouts.

WWW.LORNAJANE.NZ

RAB SUPERFLUX HOODY

RRP: $229.95

Up for any high-intensity mountain day from hikes to climbs and scrambles, the Superflux Hoody balances warmth, breathability, and comfort.

WWW.OUTFITTERS.CO.NZ

RAB MICROLIGHT ALPINE DOWN JACKET

RRP: $399.95

Combining proven mountain utility with refined styling and feather-light packability, the Microlight Alpine Jacket is the perfect New Zealand down layer for year-round mountain activities.

WWW.OUTFITTERS.CO.NZ

LORNA JANE AMY THERMAL ACTIVE ZIP THROUGH JACKET

RRP: $176.00

Zip up in the Amy Thermal Active Zip Through Jacket. It's slim fit and Thermal fabric will give you the silhouette you strive for, whilst keeping you extra warm on those chilly morning walks. Finished with thumbholes and 4 way stretch, it is the perfect winter essential for your wardrobe.

WWW.LORNAJANE.NZ

RAB FIREWALL MOUNTAIN JACKET

RRP: $649.95

Equipped for year-round hikes, scrambles, and mountaineering, the Firewall Mountain Jacket is a true all-mountain shell that will keep you dry no matter the conditions.

WWW.OUTFITTERS.CO.NZ

MARMOT WM'S MINIMALIST PERTEX JACKET

RRP: $449.00

Ultralight Rain Shell with 2.5L Pertex® Shield Revolve is waterproof, windproof, and breathable. Seam-taped with C0 DWR, pit zips, and harness-friendly pockets for efficient, packable protection. 301g.

WWW.MARMOTNZ.CO.NZ

RAB XENAIR ALPINE LIGHT JACKET

RRP: $399.95

Now featuring a new, even more breathable lining, the Xenair Alpine Light expertly deals with changes in energy and temperature without you needing to remove layers.

WWW.OUTFITTERS.CO.NZ

MOUNTAIN EQUIPMENT OREUS HOODED WOMEN'S JACKET

RRP $849.95

Lightweight, breathable synthetic jacket with down-like warmth. PFAS-free, helmet-compatible hood, and packs into its own pocket. Perfect for alpine adventures and active use.

WWW.OUTDOORACTION.CO.NZ

OUTDOOR RESEARCH WOMEN'S ASPIRE 3L JACKET

RRP: $399.99

Packable, weatherproof shell made from recycled AscentShell™ Dry for durable, waterproof, breathable performance with stretch and a PFAS-free Nikwax Direct. DRY water repellent finish. Features full seam-taping, adjustable hood with a bonded brim, TorsoFlo™ zips for venting excess heat fast, a drawcord hem and hook-and-loop cuff closures. 395g

WWW.BIVOUAC.CO.NZ

OUTDOOR RESEARCH WOMEN'S DEVIATOR HOODIE

RRP: $399.99

Extremely breathable, strategically insulated jacket, ideal for high-aerobic adventures in cool weather. Features VerticalX™ Octa insulation technology, a softshell fabric on the front, shoulders, sleeves and hood adds weather resistance and a breathable grid fleece on the back, side panels and underarms provides a full range of motion. 335g

WWW.BIVOUAC.CO.NZ

MARMOT WM'S NOVUS LT HOODY

RRP: $399.95

Stay warm and mobile with the Novus LT Hoody. PrimaLoft® Silver insulation keeps heat in, even when wet, while stretchy, recycled nylon with C0 DWR repels light moisture. Articulated fit, pit gussets, and a drawcord hem offer all-day comfort on the move. 444g.

WWW.MARMOTNZ.CO.NZ

OUTDOOR RESEARCH WOMEN'S ALPINE ONSET MARINE 150 LEGGINGS

RRP: $179.99

Breathable, moisture-wicking base layer that feels soft and stretches with you. Made from a Merino wool blend that also provides odour resistance and UPF 30 protection. Worn solo or layered they are the perfect foundation for your adventures.

WWW.BIVOUAC.CO.NZ

OUTDOOR RESEARCH WOMEN'S CIRQUE III PANTS

RRP: $299.99

Designed for mobility and protection on alpine adventures, perfect for 3-season use. Stretch double weave fabric that is wind, water and abrasion-resistant and breathable. Features an avalanche beacon pocket with clip, inbuilt belt, articulated knees, scuff guards and gusseted ankle zips.

WWW.BIVOUAC.CO.NZ

LORNA JANE DOLCE VITA RIB ANKLE BITER LEGGINGS

RRP: $150.00

Elevate your workout wardrobe and embrace the effortlessly cool in the Dolce Vita Rib Ankle Biter Leggings. Crafted from irresistibly soft and sweat wicking Luxe Active Rib fabric, these leggings feature form flattering rouching at the waist and a secret back pocket to stash your essentials. This style is perfect for Pilates, yoga and coffee catch-ups.

WWW.LORNAJANE.NZ

LORNA JANE VARSITY HERITAGE PANTS

RRP: $140.00

This varsity track inspired style features side pockets to stash your essentials and elasticated waist with drawcord adjustability for all-day comfort. Complete with limited edition embroidered iconic logo, this is the standout athleisure styling piece you've been waiting for.

WWW.LORNAJANE.NZ

KATHMANDU WOMEN'S WINTERBURN HOODED DOWN VEST

RRP: $279.98

With 600-fill down, this vest packs a punch against the cold, wrapping you in a cocoon of toasty goodness.

WWW.KATHMANDU.CO.NZ

SALEWA SELLA LIGHT AVALANCHE SHOVEL

RRP: $189.90

The Sella Light's low-weight, high-strength aluminium and compact pack size make it the ideal tool for the for digging. Featuring an extra-sharp, extra-large rigid tempered aluminium blade for enhanced penetration, and the ergonomic telescopic shaft with T-grip ensures secure grip and handling.
Size: Extended 79cm / Collapsed 56cm
Shovel Blade: 27 – 20cm / Weight: 560g

WWW.BOBO.CO.NZ/SALEWA

SALEWA WINTER MATE 28L

RRP: $269.90

Our Winter Mate women's pack is made from robust, double-ripstop 420-denier and 750-denier polyester with a PFC-free water-repellent coating. Its winter-spec includes features such as parallel ski fixation, ice axe, and snowboard attachment, avalanche safety pocket for rapid access to a shovel and probe, and a full-length zip for fast access to all contents. In addition, there's a secure valuables pocket with key holder.
Size: 55x25x19cm Torso Length: 38 – 45cm / Weight: (W) 940g (pictured)

WWW.BOBO.CO.NZ/SALEWA

PATAGONIA WOMEN'S UNTRACKED JACKET

RRP: $ 1,149.99

The Untracked Jacket harnesses the technical prowess of 3-layer 100% recycled nylon GORE-TEX ePE Performance fabric for unrelenting storm protection that won't restrict your movement, with a soft-knit interior backer to help manage moisture on the skintrack. Fabric, membrane and durable water repellent (DWR) finish are made without intentionally added PFAS. Made in a Fair Trade Certified™ factory.

WWW.PATAGONIA.CO.NZ

PATAGONIA WOMEN'S MICRO PUFF® JACKET

RRP: $519.99

The Micro Puff® Jacket combines ultralight Pertex® Quantum shell fabric with PlumaFill insulation, and the result is the best warmth-to-weight ratio of any jacket we've ever created and the highest compressibility of any of our synthetic jackets. It's your go-to insulation piece for mixed (and possibly miserable) cold conditions. The shell fabric is made with NetPlus® 100% postconsumer recycled nylon ripstop made from recycled fishing nets, and the insulation is 100% recycled polyester. Made in a Fair Trade Certified™ factory.

WWW.PATAGONIA.CO.NZ

SALEWA WILDFIRE NXT GORE-TEX®

RRP: $419.90

Hiking comfort meets climbing precision – the Wildfire NXT Gore-Tex® is a high-performance, lightweight and durable approach shoe with a seamless Kevlar®-reinforced Matryx® upper, and an oversized cushioning midsole. Its unique Vibram® All-Terrain™ Megagrip outsole provides secure grip and traction in all conditions, while our trademark 3F System holds the ankle and wraps the sides of your foot to guarantee a true fit with good support, and agility.
Fit: STANDARD / Weight: (M) 360 g (W) 305g (pictured)

WWW.BOBO.CO.NZ/SALEWA

SALEWA PEDROC POWERTEX

RRP: $399.90

Designed for moving fast in the mountains. This lightweight, versatile, yet protective technical trail shoe has an eco-friendly PFC-free Powertex® membrane for waterproof protection, and good breathability. The strong ripstop mesh upper and TPU rand offer high abrasion resistance. The EVA midsole delivers optimal rebound, and the Pomoca™ Speed Hiker Pro outsole works well on mud, grass and rock.
Fit: STANDARD / Weight: (M) 345 g (W) 260g (pictured)

WWW.BOBO.CO.NZ/SALEWA

SALEWA WILDFIRE NXT

RRP: $359.90

Designed to go from door to summit, the Wildfire NXT is our most advanced approach shoe. It features a seamless Kevlar®-reinforced Matryx® fabric upper that combines hiking comfort with climbing performance. Featuring our updated 3F System on the heel and lateral areas, this shoe wraps the ankle and outer edge of the foot to promote agility, while its TPU rand protects you from rocks and scree. Underfoot, its fast-moving Vibram® All-Terrain™ Megagrip® outsole design provides climbing precision and secure grip on any terrain, in both wet and dry conditions.
Fit: STANDARD / Weight: (M) 345 g (W) 295g (pictured)

WWW.BOBO.CO.NZ/SALEWA

EXPED ULTRA 7R MUMMY SLEEPING MAT (MEDIUM)

RRP: $369.99

Lightweight, supportive mat insulated with responsibly-sourced down insulation for adventures in sub-zero temperatures. Compact packed size, a recycled 20D ripstop face fabric and 9cm-thick chambers with fatter chambers at the sides to reduce the chance of rolling off. Certified carbon neutral by myclimate™.183cm long, 52cm wide tapering to 35cm. R-value of 7.1. 495g

WWW.BIVOUAC.CO.NZ

INSELBERG CENTILE HOODY

RRP: $550.00

Developed with Everest guides, this lightweight down insulated hoody balances moisture control, warmth, and durability.

WWW.INSELBERG.COM

KIWI ULTRALIGHT DOWN QUILTS

RRP:FROM $490.00

One of the top warmth-to-weight sleep systems on the market, filled with 850+FP ethically-sourced goose down, and custom made in New Zealand. There’s a box-baffle design, removable footbox with zip closure, pad strap attachments, neck drawstring, customised length, and 20% overfill for longevity. Comes in three different comfort ratings Comfort ratings 5°C, 0°C, -5°C, or made to order Weight From 390g.

WWW.KIWIULTRALIGHT.CO.NZ

KIWI ULTRALIGHT

INSELBERG MONIC JACKET

RRP: $290.00

Lightweight wind jacket with hybrid stretch panels and tuned breathability for high-output mountain pursuits.

WWW.INSELBERG.COM

FLIPFUEL.CO
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FLIPFUEL® FUEL TRANSFER DEVICE

RRP $69.95

Ultra-light (40 g) aluminum valve for isobutane canisters; consolidates partial fuel, refills on trail, backed by replacement guarantee—saves weight, money, reduces waste.

WWW.OUTDOORACTION.CO.NZ

INSELBERG HEDRON PANT

RRP: $310.00

Durable double-weave climbing pant with stretch, articulation, and tapered legs for unrestricted movement.

WWW.INSELBERG.COM

THAT'S IT.
ANTI-CHAFE GEL

THAT’S IT ANTI CHAFE GEL

FROM RRP: $6.50

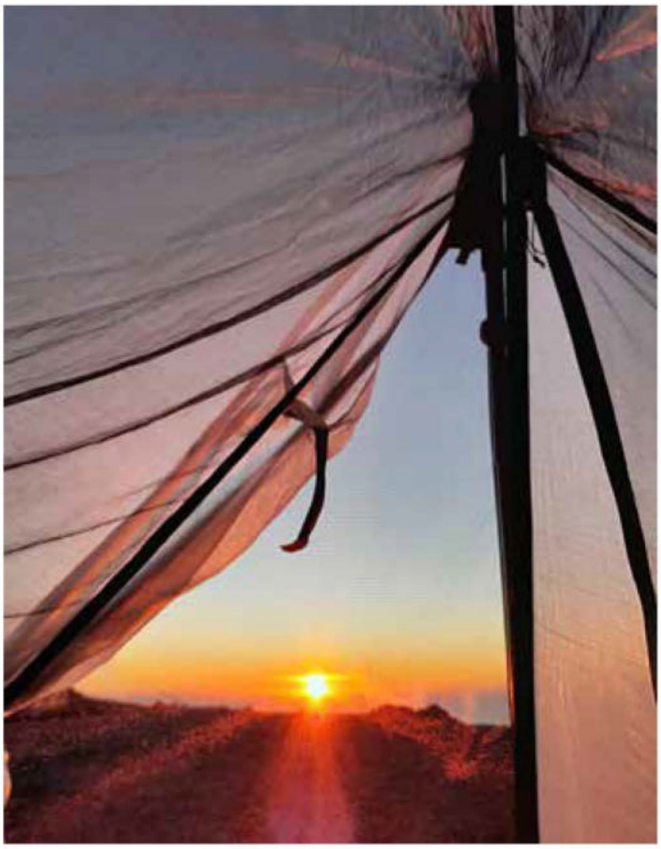
Stop chafing and blistering before it occurs with That’s It Anti Chafe Gel. 100% natural, anti bacterial and anti fungal, our Anti Chafe Gel is built to protect you when you are out running, surfing, cycling or hiking. Shop online or find a stockist near you at:

WWW.THATSIT.NZ

YETI RANCHERO™27L BACKPACK RRP $475.00

The Easy Access 27L Ranchero™ Backpack is the ultimate companion for those who blur the lines between work and play. This streamlined commuter focuses on access, allowing you to quickly grab your gear without breaking your stride

WWW.NZYETI.COM



The double door design enabled me to see sunset from one door and sunrise from the other

THE TRAMPING GOURMET

My Journey into Ultralight Hiking

By Dee Yang

"How do you carry all that and still look like you're on a day walk?" People ask me this all the time. The answer? I'm not a magician - I just pack ultralight. And I have Kiwi Ultralight gear to thank for making that possible.

At 5'1" and under 45kg, I once hauled a 15kg pack around Mt Ruapehu's Around the Mountain track. I made it – barely - but paid the price with aching knees, falls on gravel, and compression pain that lingered long after the trail ended. If I wanted to keep tramping, something had to change.

Why Ultralight?
That's when I started researching ultralight tramping, and found Kiwi Ultralight. Before that, I was importing gear from overseas: long wait times, shipping costs, customs hassles, and sizing that never quite fit. Finding a local New Zealand company making custom gear for people like me? Game-changing. Now I use their quilt, pack, and most recently, the Moa 1-person tent (V2.0), which I had the privilege of testing on a wild trip up Mt Taranaki.

People misunderstand ultralight all the time. Some trampers assumed I was endangering myself in alpine conditions. In reality, I carry more emergency gear than most - first aid kit, PLB, emergency poncho, even a hot water bottle and compact CPR kit.

I've always loved cooking, too. Combining both passions means my trips are now equal parts simple and glamorous. My friends call it "Master Chef in the Wilderness." Because for me, tramping isn't about pain. It's about freedom, comfort, and joy - and the right gear makes that possible. That's what ultralight gear lets me do.

The Quilt That Started It All
The first item I wanted to upgrade was my sleeping bag, it was bulky and unreasonably heavy. I ended up ruining an expensive standard-length sleeping bag by trying to shorten it myself. There just weren't any high-quality, down-filled sleep systems sized for someone my height.

Down feathers were floating through my house for weeks. Then Debra from Kiwi Ultralight made me a quilt rated to -5°C that weighs just 520g. It fits me perfectly, and the warmth-to-weight ratio is incredible. I've used it across three seasons, in huts and tents, and it's become my most treasured piece of gear. Even when I forgot the elastic straps on a recent trip to Mt Taranaki, I was able to convert it into a makeshift mummy bag and stay warm in near-zero temperatures.

Repacking My Pack
After upgrading my sleep system, I had so much more room (and less weight) in my old 45L pack. That's when I started eyeing Kiwi Ultralight's frameless pack. I was hesitant at first. I'd always used framed packs for back support and ventilation. But the Tui 42 was half the weight of my Osprey Lumina - and I'm all about shaving grams where I can.

I came up with my own system: I use a mesh bag shaped like the back of the pack to hold my quilt, creating a soft, even "cushion" that sits right against my back. It's comfortable, compressible, and holds all my sleep gear (quilt, mat, and pillow) in one place. I pack food and emergency gear around it and never feel any hard bumps. My luxury items, like fresh meat and veg, go in the outside pockets, cooled by flexible water flasks (sometimes frozen, depending on the walk).

My full pack weight? Around 9kg - including all the real food and creature comforts!

Testing the Moa 1-Person Tent in DCF
Most recently, I had the chance to test Kiwi UL's Moa 1-person tent, made of Dyneema (DCF) - an incredible material I had read about but never used. I took it on a solo trip to Mt Taranaki, where I spent three days in strong alpine wind, with daytime gusts hitting 50km/h and temps dropping near 0°C.

The setup was quick, even in brutal wind. Nevertheless, my tent stayed strong and proud for 2 days in crazy wind, to my greatest surprise. I loved the double door design too. I enabled me to see sunset from one door, and sunrise from the other.

The inner black mesh is dark, the outer shines pearl white in the sun. Combined, the tent gives good privacy. A fellow tramper described the tent as it looked from the summit. "Like a sailing boat floating in the sea. The tent really impressed me overall. It's durable, dry, and incredibly light at only 615 grams!

Living Well, Walking Light
I've never written gear reviews before. I'm not paid to promote anything. But after years of being questioned, underestimated, or misunderstood on the trail, I wanted to share what ultralight tramping really means to me.

It's not about skipping essentials or being reckless. It's about understanding materials, pack design, thermal physics, and your own limits. It's for anyone who wants to go further with less strain - especially those of us who are smaller, lighter, or simply want to enjoy tramping without punishing our bodies. I manage to eat fresh food most of my trips, making my multi day hike more fun. I get all that, plus my gear, in a pack that weights less than 9k! Can you believe it?

Kiwi Ultralight gear has made that possible for me. It's functional, beautiful, locally made, and thoughtfully designed. Now, instead of dreading how I'll manage the weight, I get excited to plan my meals, enjoy the views, and sleep like royalty under the stars.

I hope my experience shows that ultralight hiking doesn't mean going without - it means going wisely.

(Kiwi Ultralight Moa 1 in DCF will be available starting in October 2025!)

> *"Ultralight hiking doesn't mean going without - it means going wisely."*

Adventure Better
New Zealand!
KIWI ULTRALIGHT
New Zealand's own ultralight gear manufacturer
Check out the full range of ultralight products @ KiwiUltralight.co.nz

INSELBERG AXIOM SHELL - MADE FOR PURPOSE

Alpine gear usually fails quietly—zipper by zipper, seam by seam, under conditions where failure can't be patched. For New Zealand's alpine professionals, that failure isn't theoretical. It happens on wet rock faces, in storms that last for days, and under loads that punish every stitch. Solving that kind of problem meant building something new. Inselberg worked with members of the Aoraki Mount Cook Alpine Rescue Team (AMCART) to build a shell that didn't just survive conditions like these—but was made for them.

Among those involved from the start was Jamie Marr, a guide and former AMCART member with years of experience operating in high alpine terrain. Over a 36-month development process—driven by feedback, iteration, and field testing—he helped shape the concept into a working reality.

The solution was the Axiom Shell: a four-layer hardshell jacket engineered to operate at the margins—where rain turns to ice, where storms stall for days, and where gear must perform through constant friction, impact, and weather. When it came time for the final round of testing, Marr took a late-stage prototype to one of the harshest natural environments available: Baihe (White River), a granite gorge just north of Beijing.

Baihe is no pristine alpine basin. It is coarse, exposed, and relentless. Granite towers rise from the valley like forgotten ramparts of the Great Wall. The cliffs are riddled with razor-sharp cracks, slick slabs, and a sheer verticality rarely found so close to a city of twenty million. Katabatic winds funnel down the gullies and drop the temperature into the single digits.

"Granite is brutal," said Marr. "It's the kind of surface that destroys outerwear quickly. You feel every scrape. Over multiple days, I tested the jacket while climbing sharp cracks, hauling gear over abrasive surfaces, and scrambling through rough granite gullies. No failures. No breakdown. No tearing. That's what I was there to prove."

Marr's feedback—documented daily—focused on abrasion resistance, freedom of movement, and overall fit during sustained climbs. Rather than relying on a pass/fail lab test, Inselberg treated this field trial as the final benchmark before release. When the jacket came back dusty and scraped but structurally sound, the team knew it had met the standard.

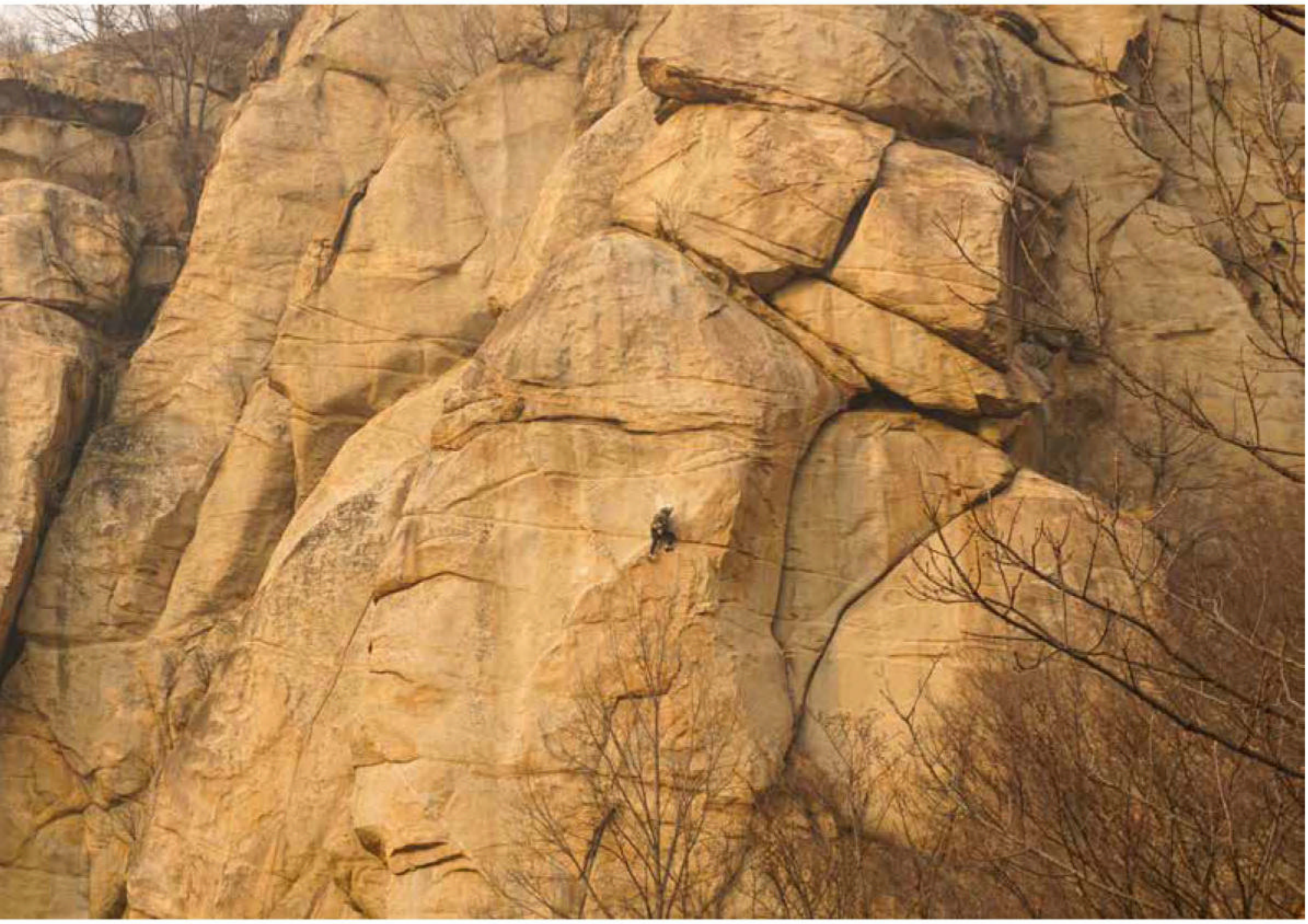
"Baihe was never about glamour testing," said Jarlath Anderson, founder of Inselberg. "It was about real climbing, on exposed granite, in abrasive conditions, with unpredictable winds and significant temperature swings. Jamie didn't wear this thing for a photo. He tried to break it. That's what we needed."

Anderson founded Inselberg in 2021 with a clear design philosophy: work backwards from real problems faced by alpine professionals. That meant no trend-driven roadmaps, no expanding seasonal colourways, and no rushing to market. Instead, each product begins with a use case—then gets prototyped, refined, and tested until it earns its place in a climber's pack.

The Axiom Shell is the purest expression of that process. Eighteen full rounds of prototyping were completed over a three-year period. Early samples used asymmetrical seam patterns and different articulations between the left and right sides of the shell to enable real-time comparisons—a method Inselberg calls "Frankenstein prototyping." Garments were returned to the brand's development lab to be disassembled, analysed, and rebuilt, with pattern changes implemented within 48 hours.

From the start, Inselberg opted for a four-layer laminate construction—developed and produced in Japan—as the foundation of the shell. Rated to 40,000mm, it offers double the waterproof protection of most standard three-layer fabrics, while retaining breathability under sustained effort through zippered ventilation panels. It adds a margin of durability that matters when jackets are used for months at a time in ice, wind, and rain.

"Three-layer systems are great until they aren't," said Anderson. "When sideways rain and gusting wind hits you on an exposed ridgeline and you've still got hours to go, your shell has to hold. That's why we chose a four-layer construction—it's overbuilt by design."



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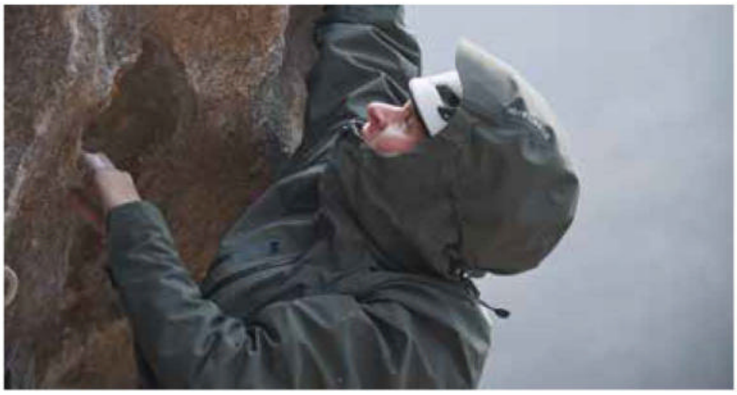
In keeping with Inselberg's commitment to precision, the Axiom was built around a specific alpine use case. Every element was driven by need—no assumptions, no excess. This isn't a jacket assembled from defaults. It's the outcome of deliberate, technical decisions made through field testing, pattern refinement, and lab validation. No superfluous toggles. No decorative trims. Just engineered precision for serious alpine terrain.

Inselberg will mark the launch of the Axiom Shell with a five-day experiential space in Britomart, Auckland, from July 9–13. Designed to offer a hands-on look at the development process, the space will feature waterproof testing rigs, air-permeability demonstrations, and an abrasion testing station that mirrors the kind of punishment the Axiom endured on Baihe's granite.
The Axiom Shell will be available for preorder on July 30th.
For more details go to **www.inselberg.com**



FURTHER FASTER FIREPOT DEHYDRATED MEALS

Reviewed by Eric Skilling

Let's face it – stepping out into the wilderness with a pack full of meat-based dehydrated meals is something we adventurers don't want to think about too deeply. Weighed down by the carbon footprint of a flight across the world, these meals make a mockery of any explorer with an ounce of environmental conscience. Using the excuse that palatable vegetarian meals are as rare as finding a spotted kiwi out in the bush is now, like kiwi-spotting, as outdated as hob-nailed boots.

Christchurch-based FurtherFaster stocks the Firepot range of both meat-based and vegetarian options. I knew anything recommended by Further Faster would have been researched and tested by this team of experienced outdoor enthusiasts. I was lured by the vegetarian options.

Firepot pride themselves on minimising the carbon footprint of their meals, from sourcing ingredients and meal preparation to the customised dehydration equipment and eventual distribution.

Vegetarian choices include a green gumbo, orzo Bolognese, mac-and-greens, and posh baked beans, all of which would satisfy even the most carnivorous of us. However, for me, the porcini mushroom risotto was the standout – creamy with slices of actual porcini mushroom – a classy meal up there with any meat-based risotto I have enjoyed.

There is no doubt Firepot will be in my pack for the next overnight trip.

> *"FurtherFaster stocks the Firepot range of both meat-based and vegetarian options."*

ADIDAS TERREX – A NEW AGE IN TRAIL RUNNING

Reviewed by Nick Laurie

Adidas are moving into the trail running market by releasing a new range of Ultra, Trail and fast hiking shoes under the name Terrex.

They are sponsoring some well-known athletes and their gear appeared at the UTMB world ultra champs last year. They sponsor 2 of the best NZ ultra runners, Dan Jones (Kepler record holder, Tarawera 100k winner and Western States 100 top 5) and Ruby Muir (Kepler Champ, Tarawera winner and several European Titles) and it is testament to the shoe that these guns rave about the performance of the Terrex trail shoe.

Polar opposite to these supreme athletes is me, a 61 year old cart horse. I was given a pair of these beauties to try over 2 demanding races. I tested the Terrex Agravic 3 Trail shoe. First up I tried them on The Routeburn Classic. This is a schist covered track with some gnarly downhill sections. Verdict - easy flow with a sturdy toe box for the odd rock kick. Pliable so that they could help my feet and ankles adapt to the varying terrain. I did better in the rough downhill section this year. I put it down to the shoe. They are white and this track is not too dirty, so they came out looking pristine.

The second race was the muddy, rooty Hunua Super Long race in The NZ trail series. The continental soles with lugs looked at first glance as though I would struggle. The lugs are spaced quite wide apart, so the mud doesn't gather or clump too much. I was able to execute the slippery downhill sections with a bit of bravery and felt like I was able to tap dance down through the mud and roots. No bruised toes from root kicks and the last 3k down a step gravel road I was able to sing like a sweet tui. The whiteness of the shoe did not fare too well and they are now grey.

Features: A blend of comfort, durability and stability
3 layer breathable upper for foot comfort and water draining
Continental rubber sole with a 4mm lug profile.
Thin ankle hugging tongue
Good tight heel box with good locking laces.

Verdict: My current favourite.

Designed in **New Zealand** - Created with **Polartec**

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Xterra day start

MOOREA XTERRA:

MORE THAN JUST A RACE

Words by Kate Muir, Images by Zac Dickinson

> "I left a piece of my heart there, and I know I'll be back to collect it."

The crew at Ait Tahiti Nui handed me a small white fragrant flower called a Tiare, Tahiti's national bloom, they said, a symbol of hospitality and connection. Right then, I knew this trip was going to be something special. The warmth hit me the second I stepped off the plane at Faa'a International Airport. Fresh flower leis draped around my neck, smiling faces everywhere, it was like being wrapped in a hug from the island itself.

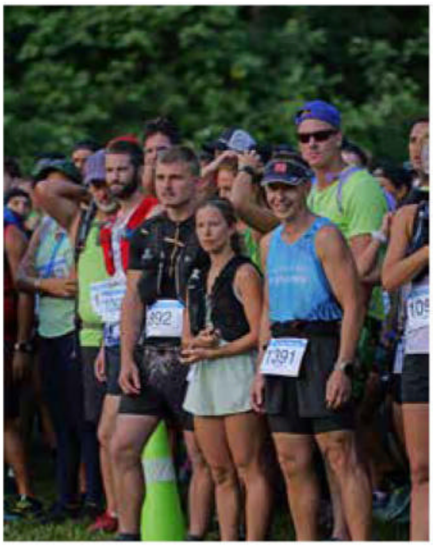
The transfer to InterContinental Tahiti was luxury after the 5-hour flight. Cold water, mints, air conditioning, simple touches that made you cared for. Even though we were a little weary, I couldn't resist one Hinano at the late-opening bar.

Waking up the next morning, I felt anticipation as we made our way to the ferry terminal. Meeting the team from Tahiti Tourism and Manoa was like reuniting with old friends, even though we'd just met. The ferry ride to Moorea was our first real glimpse of paradise, with those mountain peaks rising from the impossible blue water, and villages scattered like jewels along the coast.

Getting our rental car was a breeze, and sliding into the driver's seat was a real treat, allowing us to see Moorea for the first time. The coastline, the peaks, those vibrant villages, the lagoons so blue so rich in colour they looked artificial. We had to pull over just to take it all in.

The Manava Beach Resort & Spa Moorea became our little slice of heaven. Our room was gorgeous, local artwork everywhere, and those beachfront views that made me want to pinch ourselves. The staff didn't just welcome us; they embraced us. Every conversation felt like catching up with a neighbour who genuinely cared about making sure we had the best possible time.

Classic Tahitian paradise



Swimming with the local wildlife

"The guides slipped into the water with us, showing us how to respectfully interact with the stingrays. No pushing, no forcing, just gentle connection."

But the real magic happened when we hit the water with Moorea Sea Experience. We've done plenty of ocean tours, but this crew was different. From the moment they arrived, I could tell these weren't just guides, they were guardians of this place. Watching them pick up floating rubbish without a word, explaining the fragile lagoon ecosystem with such passion, making the tough call not to search for whales because of high swells, it was clear they cared more about protecting this paradise than making a quick buck.

When we finally got into those calmer waters, we was speechless. Dolphins playing in our wake, turtles gliding by like ancient spirits, sharks and eagle rays and stingrays creating this underwater ballet. The guides slipped into the water with us, showing us how to respectfully interact with the stingrays. No pushing, no forcing, just gentle connection.

Lunch on Coco Island was special as well. Literally eating with our toes in the sand while stingrays glided past our table. The poisson cru was incredible, fresh, clean, perfect. But it was the whole experience that got to me. The perfect setting, the cool drink, the complete peace of it all. When they dropped us right at our resort's wharf afterward, we were already planning my next visit.

Then down to business, that evening, the energy at the XTERRA race site was electric. The fire dance wowed everyone, even little kids joining in, flames dancing against the darkening sky. Then came the traditional Tahitian blessing, and I felt this deep connection to something bigger than myself. When those head torches flicked on and the runners surged into the night, we got chills. The collective roar, the determination, the pure adventure of it all, it was not what I expected, sure it was a race, but it was more an experience.

The next day, we hiked that race trail ourselves, and holy hell, we have so much respect for those runners. It was brutal, root-tangled, steep, relentlessly hot and humid. Like New Zealand's Pinnacles Track but cranked up to eleven. Those cold freshwater streams were lifesavers, and when we finally reached the summit, that 360-degree view over Moorea took whatever breath we had left away.

MAONA NUI BOAT
EXCURSION
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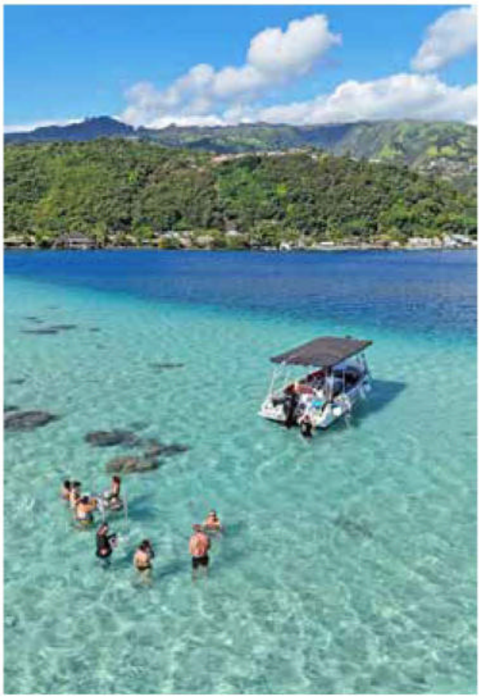
Fishing with local fishing charter



Best lunch spot in town

Tahitian sunset

> *"Tahiti isn't just a destination you visit, it's an experience that changes you. It's about connection: to the land, to the sea, and most importantly, to people who show you what true hospitality looks like."*

The daytime race had such a different vibe, more relaxed, more family-oriented. Ukulele players provide the soundtrack, while kids get ready for their own 2.5 km race on an easier course. We couldn't get official finish line access for photos, which was a bit frustrating, but honestly, being part of the celebration was enough. The cheers that rang out when each runner crossed the line, the pride as medals were handed out; XTERRA Moorea struck a perfect balance between a hardcore endurance challenge and an inclusive community celebration.

Our final morning on the fishing charter was the perfect way to say goodbye. The ocean was glass-smooth, the scenery unbeatable, and the camaraderie on board made every moment special. We caught several fish, and when that possible sailfish hit the line, the excitement was infectious. Even though it got away, we were all grinning like idiots.

What really got to me throughout this whole journey was the manaakitanga—that deep hospitality, generosity, and kindness that seemed to flow from everyone we met. From the Air Tahiti Niu crew to the resort staff, tour guides to race organizers, nobody treated us like just another group of tourists. We were guests, welcomed into their home.

And the commitment to sustainability blew me away. Reef-safe sunscreen regulations, marine protection initiatives, and tour operators leading by example, the respect for nature was woven into every single interaction. These people understand that this paradise is precious, and they're not taking any chances with it.

Tahiti isn't just a destination you visit, it's an experience that changes you. It's about connection: to the land, to the sea, and most importantly, to people who show you what true hospitality looks like. I left a piece of my heart there, and I know I'll be back to collect it.

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Swimming with the turtles

INTO THE BLUE:

SWIMMING WITH ANCIENT MARINERS IN RAROTONGA'S SACRED WATERS

The moment I slip beneath the surface of Rarotonga's crystalline lagoon, the world transforms into an underwater cathedral. Shafts of Pacific sunlight pierce the azure depths, illuminating coral gardens that have thrived for millennia. But it's not the reef's beauty that stops my breath, it's the gentle giant gliding toward me with prehistoric grace.

A turtle, its shell mottled in the sunlight, moves through the water with effortless dignity. Our eyes meet through my mask, and time seems suspended. This is what I came to the Cook Islands for: to swim alongside creatures that have navigated these waters for over 100 million years.

Swimming with turtles has become Rarotonga's premier experience, and it's easy to understand why. These waters are home to both green and hawksbill turtles, with the resident population offering near-guaranteed encounters year-round. The experience takes place in the island's reef passages, natural channels where turtles gather to feed and rest in the nutrient-rich currents.

My guide, a local guide, explains the behaviour patterns as we float above the coral. "The turtles use these passages as highways," he says through his snorkel. "They're not just passing through, they're coming home." The resident population means visitors can expect to encounter multiple turtles during a single tour, often coming remarkably close.

June and July represent the prime months for spotting turtles and eagle rays, though encounters are possible year-round due to the resident population. The Cook Islands' dry season from May to October offers the best underwater visibility, with calm seas and minimal rainfall creating ideal snorkeling conditions.

The timing of your tour matters as much as the season. Morning departures typically offer the calmest waters and clearest visibility before trade winds pick up. Most operators schedule tours during optimal tide conditions, as turtles are more active during certain tidal flows when feeding opportunities are abundant.

Water temperatures remain comfortable year-round, hovering between 24-28°C (75-82°F), meaning you can focus entirely on the experience without the distraction of cold water. The consistent tropical climate ensures that any time of year offers the potential for an unforgettable encounter.

Multiple operators offer turtle tours, each with distinct approaches. Tours typically last 1 hour and 30 minutes and include all necessary equipment, from masks and snorkels to flotation devices for less confident swimmers. Most operators provide water and snacks, though the experience itself is so captivating that refreshments become an afterthought.

Curious turtle

The choice between operators often comes down to group size preferences and special interests. Photography enthusiasts might prefer tours that include underwater cameras, while families appreciate operators offering additional flotation support and patient guides who work well with children.

While the allure of swimming with turtles independently might seem appealing, attempting this without a guide is strongly discouraged and potentially dangerous. The experience takes place in Rarotonga's dangerous passages, requiring serious safety considerations.

The reef passages where turtles congregate are the same channels that create powerful currents and unpredictable conditions. Local knowledge is essential for understanding tide patterns, current strengths, and safe entry and exit points. What appears calm from the surface can quickly become treacherous for inexperienced swimmers.

Even experienced ocean swimmers should reconsider going alone. The passages can experience sudden current changes, and without local expertise, visitors may find themselves in challenging situations far from shore. The investment in a guided tour isn't just about seeing turtles, it's about ensuring your safety in an environment that demands respect and local knowledge.

Swimming with turtles has become the #1 experience on Rarotonga, but visitors should be aware of the potential risks involved in such an amazing adventure. Cook Islands Tourism has developed a comprehensive safety framework to protect both visitors and wildlife

.

Key safety considerations include a 4:1 safety ratio, ensuring one guide for every four guests, and choosing operators who have signed the official Memorandum of Understanding. This document outlines best practices for safe turtle encounters, including proper entry techniques, wildlife interaction protocols, and emergency procedures.

The ocean environment itself presents inherent risks. Strong currents, coral cuts, and marine life encounters beyond turtles require constant vigilance. Operators certified under the safety framework provide comprehensive briefings covering hand signals, emergency procedures, and proper behaviour around marine life.

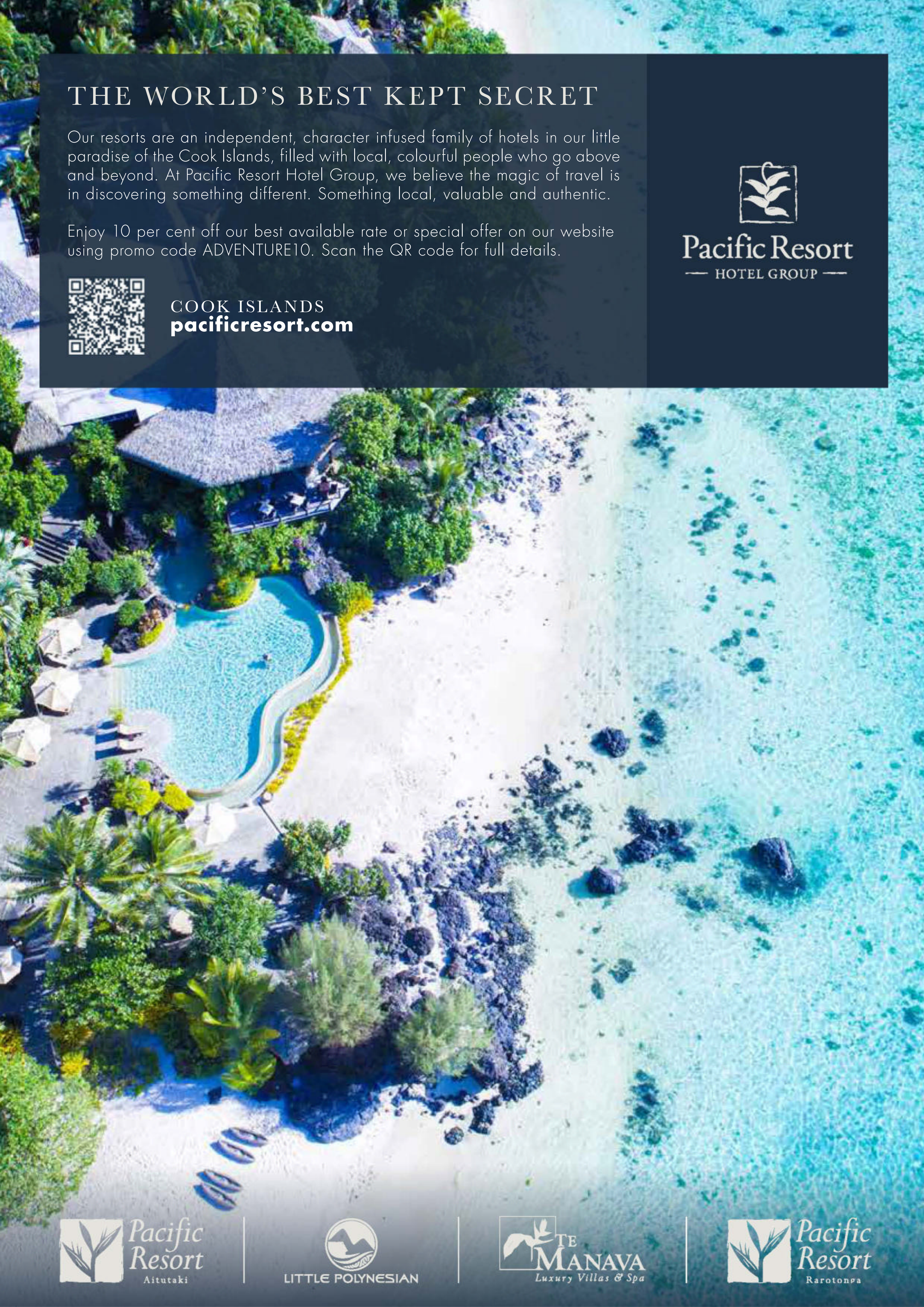
Swimming with turtles in Rarotonga offers more than personal adventure, it creates powerful connections that support conservation efforts. The experience transforms visitors into advocates. Witnessing these ancient mariners in their natural habitat creates emotional connections that extend far beyond vacation memories. Many participants return home with renewed commitments to ocean conservation, plastic reduction, and marine protection awareness.

Local operators emphasize respectful wildlife interaction, teaching visitors to observe without disturbing. This approach ensures that tourism supports rather than threatens the turtle populations that make these encounters possible.

As my tour concludes and I float back toward shore, the turtle that first captivated me makes one final pass. Its movements remain unhurried, unbothered by my presence, suggesting an acceptance that feels like a profound gift. In that moment, I understood why many visitors say swimming with turtles is the most magical experience of their trip.

Rarotonga's turtle swimming experience succeeds because it balances adventure with reverence, accessibility with safety, and tourism with conservation. It's an encounter that changes perspectives, creating memories that last long after the tropical tan fades.

The ancient mariners of Rarotonga's waters offer more than a swimming companion, they provide a connection to something timeless and profound. In their presence, we remember that we're temporary visitors in an ocean that has been their home for millions of years. The privilege of sharing their world, even briefly, is worth every precaution, every dollar, and every moment of anticipation.



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KITE-CAMPING IN THE OUTBACK

ON COURSE INTO THE WILD WEST

Text: © 2025 Gabi Steindl – www.kitegabi.com
Photos: Freya Dodd, Gabi Steindl

Suddenly, out of nowhere, a humpback whale surfaced right beside me as the Indian Ocean heaved and danced in sync with its movements. For a moment, a jolt of shock ran through my body, but it quickly turned into the widest grin across my sunburnt face. “Woooooooooooooooow, this is insane!” I could hardly believe it. I felt privileged, grateful, and ecstatic all at once. Instinctively, I steered my kite toward the ocean giant to get even closer to this breathtaking encounter. It was better than any National Geographic documentary! Mother Earth gifting me an unforgettable, real-life moment in the waves of the Outback, right at the UNESCO-listed Ningaloo Reef. When the massive marine mammal, at least 15 metres long and surely weighing close to 30 tonnes, resurfaced, it blew a misty fountain through its blowholes. Locking eyes with its giant gaze felt like a dream.

Western Australia, short: WA, is one of the oldest landmasses on Earth and, at 2.53 million square kilometres, also the country’s largest state. Out here, the words “remote” and “vast” take on a whole new meaning. The “Wild West” is a legendary playground for wave-lovers from around the globe, whether it’s surfing, kiting, windsurfing, foiling, or SUPing. The Indian and Southern Oceans deliver steady groundswells year-round, rolling thousands of kilometres unbroken toward the coast. WA’s waves are powerful. Many of its surf spots are hardcore, often remote, and strictly regulated by locals. And the real locals shouldn’t be underestimated either, from countless shark species in the water to venomous reptiles and cheeky dingos on land. It’s not for the faint- hearted, but that’s exactly why this endless coastline with its world-class waves and raw, untamed nature, offers the ultimate adventure. The best way to experience it? A road trip.

The Bush Taj Mahal

I did my first WA road trip almost 20 years ago and instantly fell in love with the place. A few years later, it became my home. Margaret River, in the southwest, is now my base. When winter sets in down south, bringing storms, rain, and weeks, sometimes months, without sunshine, my Aussie husband, Corey, an obsessed big-wave windsurfer, and I pack up and head north. Every year, we camp for several months in the deep Outback, where the desert meets the Indian Ocean.

> *"With the next town nearly 200 km away, solid preparation is key."*

With the next town nearly 200 km away, solid preparation is key. We bring 200 liters of fresh water, 150 liters of diesel and petrol, food supplies, six solar panels, several huge batteries, three fridges (well, two fridges and a freezer for fresh-caught fish), a BBQ, tables, chairs, firewood, tents, countless square meters of shade cloth, and, of course, all our toys: surfboards, kites, windsurf gear, SUPs, fishing rods. We even bring a mountain bike and a couch, because nothing beats sitting by the fire on a couch after a long day in the ocean, staring into the bush TV (the flames).

Outback Solitude for Gabi along the UNESCO World Heritage-listed Ningaloo Reef

"It's the remoteness and ruggedness that define this place: deep red earth, golden fields, wild rock formations, huge cattle and sheep stations, tiny gold-rush-era towns in the middle of nowhere, endless Outback plains, and deserts that collide with the turquoise clarity of the Indian Ocean."

Our tents, like a kite, are inflatable and easy to set up. With their sturdy airframes, they handle wind incredibly well.

Near Exmouth at a remote spot, we set up our home base, which I lovingly call "The Bush Taj Mahal". Just the packing and prep take two solid weeks; every nook and cranny in our two LandCruisers, trailer, and boat gets filled. I tow the boat; Corey tows the trailer. With nearly 20 boards strapped to the roofs, people often assume we're running a surf school or travelling with a big family. But really, we're just two wave-obsessed freaks, and given the remoteness and heaviness of the waves, you gotta bring spare boards! Sure, sleeping in a caravan would be easier and more comfortable, but we love our tent and the deep connection to nature that this raw style of living provides.

Free camping is technically illegal in WA, but along the Ningaloo Reef, there are several campgrounds to suit all tastes and budgets, from more developed sites in town to ultra-basic bush camps that feel more like Mars than Earth. These remote spots usually have no water, toilets, or phone reception, so you'll need to bring your own portable toilet.

The drive from Margaret River to the Northwest takes us several days. That legendary road sign at the 26th parallel, just south of the equator, always brings a massive grin to our faces, this is where the real Northwest begins. It's the remoteness and ruggedness that define this place: deep red earth, golden fields, wild rock formations, huge cattle and sheep stations, tiny gold-rush-era towns in the middle of nowhere, endless Outback plains, and deserts that collide with the turquoise clarity of the Indian Ocean.

The Ningaloo Reef, right off the coast, is the world's largest fringing coral reef. It starts just north of Carnarvon and stretches over 260 km up to the Muiron Islands near Exmouth. Declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2011, it's home to more than 500 species of tropical fish and 220 species of coral. It's also one of the few reliable places on Earth where the elusive whale shark visits each year, drawn by the mass coral spawning. Despite reaching lengths of up to 16 meters and weighing around 30 tons, these gentle giants glide effortlessly along the reef, feeding on krill. From July to October, about 40,000 humpback whales pass by on their migration between Antarctic feeding grounds and tropical birthing waters. They're truly massive, up to 19 meters long and 40 tons heavy, and more than once I've been sitting in the surf lineup, watching a mama humpback and her calf cruise past.

The Nyinggulu Coast (Ningaloo) is also deeply significant to the Aboriginal people, who have been connected to this land for up to 60,000 years. "Nyinggulu" means "deep water" in their language.

Even though Corey and I have spent many seasons out here, every trip is a new adventure. In the raw hands of nature, there are no guarantees. Nights are filled with the sound of the ocean, and the stars feel close enough to touch. Sudden sandstorms can suddenly reduce visibility to zero in a matter of moments and test every peg and rope in camp. When the wind comes from the inland desert, it brings millions of flies, without a head net, eating and drinking become a serious challenge. The heat can be harsh, and heavy rain turns the red earth into thick mud. Tents can only keep water out for so long before everything inside gets soaked.

Then there are the hidden threats: poisonous snakes, giant spiders, and the ever-present risk of sharks. But that's exactly what makes it so special: this stripped-back, untamed lifestyle in the heart of nature, far from any creature comforts. Every day brings new challenges, but also magic: sunrise over the vast emptiness, moonset over the ocean, crackling fire under a starlit sky, or the sense of total freedom when you wake up surrounded only by the elements.

The official wind season doesn't start until late spring, in October. Every year is different. Some seasons are calm, so we spend more time surfing and fishing. Other years bring more wind, and Corey and I live it up on the water, he windsurfing and I kiting.

About once a month, we do a town run to restock fresh fruit, veggies, water, diesel, and petrol. The Northwest has loads of small farms where you can buy produce directly. Over time, we've learned what lasts longest and how to store it. For example, we get a 10 kg box of green tomatoes that slowly ripen over weeks, perfect for fresh tomato salads with onions and olives. Same with bananas; we usually buy two boxes of green ones. Corey and I are both pescatarians, and he's an incredible fisherman. We've been married for 15 years, and I've become a decent fisherwoman under his wing. When there's no wind or waves, we spend hours out on our 4.2- meter aluminium dinghy, sometimes all day, which is pushing the relationship hahaha. It's tough on the body, but we often come home with great catches. We vacuum-pack and freeze our haul using solar power. The Red Emperor Snapper is the king of the Northwest and everyone's dream catch. Corey and I love this stunning fish and eat every part of it. We even bake the big red head in foil over the fire. The eyes, tongue, and lips are the tastiest bits.

The sessions we score out here are unforgettable. Far from civilisation and without fast medical help, big swells carry real risk. Sadly, this is a place where lives have been lost, and serious injuries do happen. Still, the ocean and the Outback keep calling us back, alive with energy and wild creatures. It's home to emus, bustards (Australia's heaviest flying bird, up to 120 cm tall and 15 kg), thorny devils, and plenty of kangaroos. Among the reptiles are snakes, many harmless, but some deadly. That's why it's essential to keep tent doors zipped and food scraps cleaned up. Mice attract snakes, and snakes love mice.

Last spring, like many years before, we sat for the final time of the season under a sky full of stars, eyes salty and glowing like little kids'. The next morning, we'd head back to civilisation. A giant shooting star blazed across the sky. We sat in silence, hand in hand, reflecting on the past months, deeply fulfilled and already pumped for the next Outback mission.

Where the desert meets the sea

Bungarra — the real locals

Campfire under the Milky Way

An unforgettable encounter with a Humpback Whale

RUNNING ON FIRE

YASUR VOLCANO RUN 2025

Dawn creeps across Sulphur Bay in soft amber bands. Somewhere in the jungle a shell horn sounds, and athletes begin to gather beside the ash plain. Their goal is simple and spectacular: climb a living volcano that erupts several times an hour.

For the people of East Tanna this race is more than sport. Chiefs, youth mentors, women leaders, drivers, lodge owners—every corner of the community has a seat on the Local Organising Committee. They own the event, they run the logistics, they guide the visitors, and they decide where every vatu of profit is spent. Enter the Yasur Volcano Run and you buy school books, restore reef gardens, and fund cyclone-proof roofs.

A Mountain that Speaks

Mount Yasur rises just 361 metres, yet it rules the skyline. Captain Cook steered toward its red glow in 1774; generations later the John Frum movement still calls the crater home. Yasur is a textbook stratovolcano, built where the Indo-Australian Plate ducks beneath the Pacific Plate. The cone is bare pumice and cinder, the summit a perfect circle some 400 metres across, the lava lake muttering in the deep. Walk too close and your boots singe; stand back and every blast punches hot air into your chest. Visitors liken the noise to thunder trapped in a drum.

The Courses

- Warrior Challenge 38 km — about 950 metres of climbing, open to runners 18 years and older
- Elite Route 25 km — about 800 metres of climbing, open to runners 16 years and older

Both options start near the tide line. The route crosses white and black sand, fords creeks under banyan canopies, skips across waterfall ledges, and slices the broad ash plain that fans from the crater. Ten villages cheer the passing surge before the final push to the rim. At the top the Pacific wind mixes with sulphur and steam, and the finish tape flutters in the glow of molten stone.

Sea-Level Legends

A smaller story plays out the same morning. The Pikinini Race pairs one child, eight to fifteen years, with a parent or guardian. It covers a shorter loop but still weaves jungle, river, and ash. For many youngsters it will be the first time they stand inside the caldera that anchors their folklore. Side-by-side they run, swapping high fives with elders, learning that courage lives in footsteps, not phones.

Why It Matters

Trail running circuits can feel interchangeable—same gels, same bibs, same finish-line DJ. Yasur is different. You share kava with the chief who plotted the checkpoints. You sleep in a village bungalow where the race director's aunt fries your plantains. You stare into a vent that could rewrite the course at any moment, and you realise the stopwatch is a sideshow. The real story is a community proving that adventure tourism can flow on local terms.

Registration is open now and capped to keep the impact light. Packages include meals sourced on the island, walking tours of kastom sites, and guides who grew up tracing every lava channel. The run itself may last only a few hours, but the memory will sit in your bones like volcanic heat long after the ash is washed from your shoes.

Ready to run on fire? Tanna is waiting.

For more info check out www.caldera-impact.com/event/yasur-volcano-run-2025/

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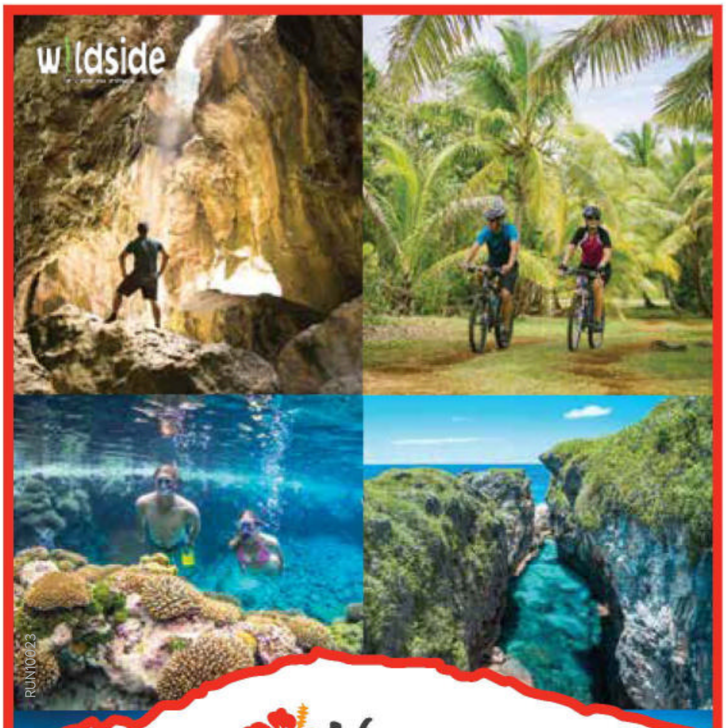
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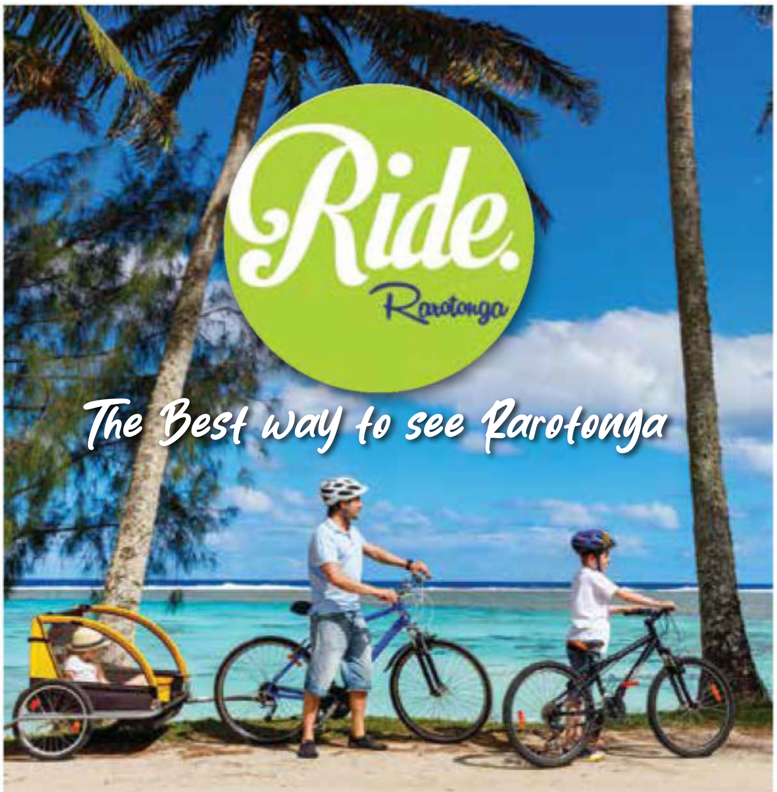
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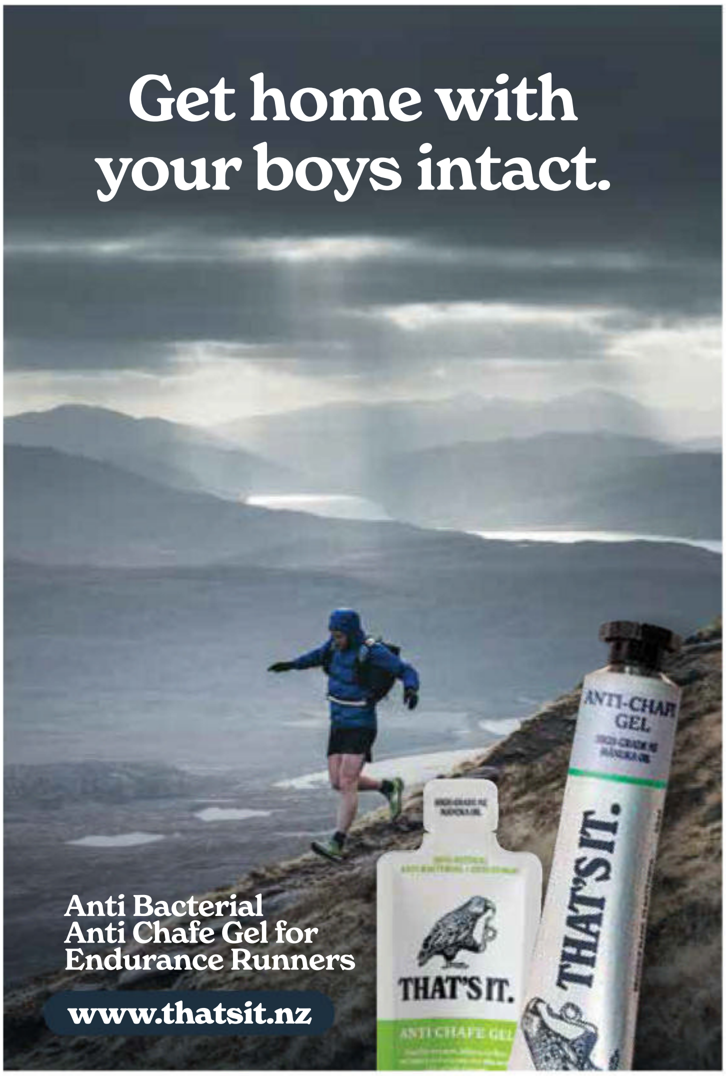
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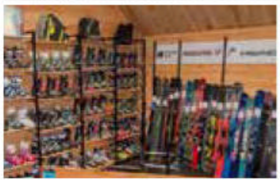

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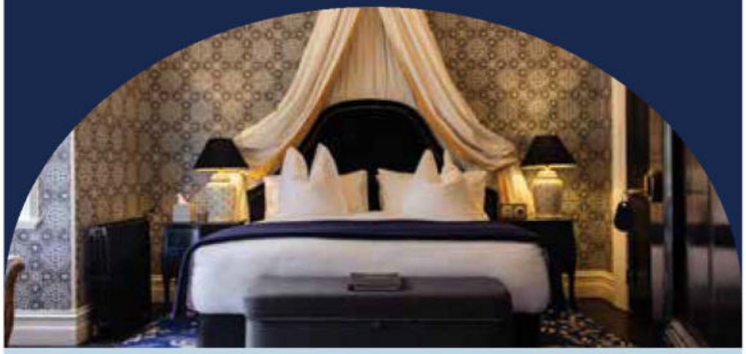

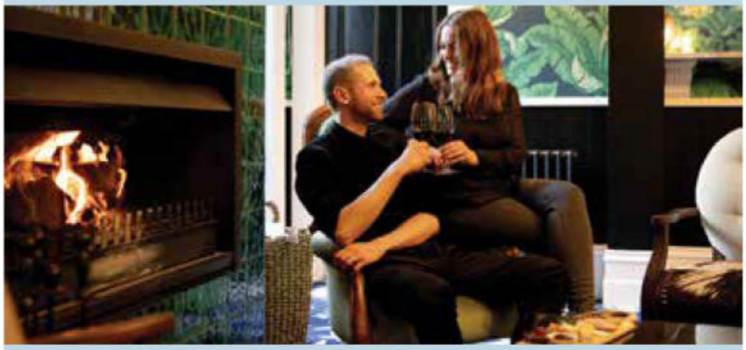

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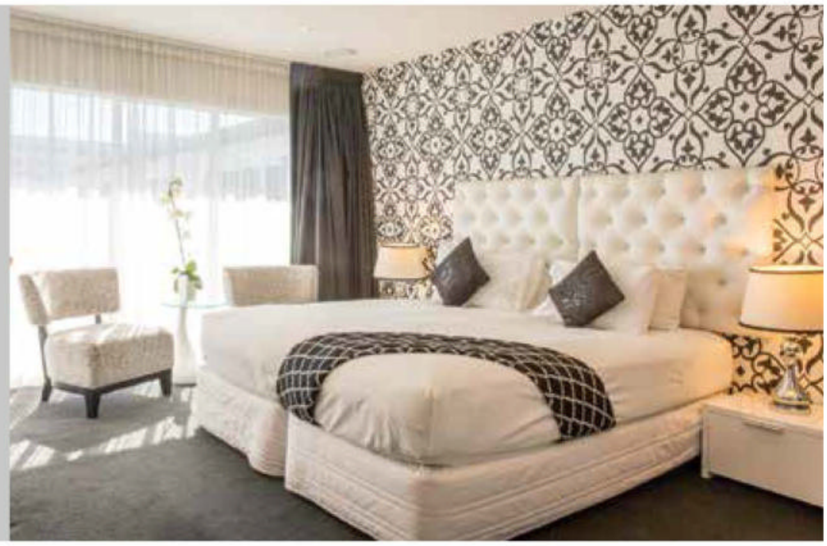

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